

SHORT STORIES

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In Four Volumes

MASTI VENKATESA IYENGAR

Volume II

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The following notes may be of use to readers who are not familiar with the Kannada country.

Festival of lights: Dipavali. It is usual for the father-in-law's household to invite the son-in-law for the festival the first few years after marriage. *Ashrama:* Hermitage. *Kusa:* The Sanskrit name for a grass which is considered pure and is used for ceremonial purposes. *Mutt:* A religious institution generally presided over by an ascetic teacher. *Kumkum:* A red powder, as also the auspicious mark made with it on the face. *Jutka:* A two-wheeled pony cart. *Subedar:* Another name for Amildar, the Revenue officer in charge of a Taluk. *Jamabandi:* The annual settlement of land revenue. *Sowcar:* The wealthy man who is often a money-lender. *Danger through the foot soldier:* It is considered particularly disgraceful to lose by exposing your king to the opponent's pawn. *Chavadi:* The village-hall where the business of the village is transacted. *Archak:* The man who conducts worship in a temple.

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RANGAPPA'S FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Having told you of Rangappa's marriage I propose to tell you of the first festival of lights for which he was invited by his uncle-in-law.

Ammayya is Rangappa's younger sister, some seven or eight years old and a very smart child. When she grows up and marries she will give no end of trouble to her husband, I am sure. What trouble, do you ask? Well, trouble all round. He will speak to her and she will keep mum; he will try to go near her and she will walk away; when she does speak, she will speak in a very crooked way. Altogether the fellow who marries her is destined to a muckle of botheration. I am very happy that I am not a young fellow awaiting marriage. Supposing I had been, who knows I might not have had the bad luck to come across her and become her husband, and then what should have happened to me?

I started to tell you of Rangappa's festival of lights and am speaking of his sister Ammayya.. The reason for this is that I got the information about the doings of that festival from Ammayya. She was of the party that went with Rangappa to his uncle-in-law's house. How should I know what occurred there? Rangappa, of course, could not tell me; what he had done was not a thing

of which he could be proud. Ratnamma will not tell of her husband's bothering her and her own girlish stupidity. How can so young a wife speak of these things? Rangappa's mother might tell, it is true, but when is she to sit at leisure and talk of this to me? Almost the only person therefore from whom I could get any information about this business was Ammayya, and from her I ascertained everything, and that is why I started with describing her.

Somehow in such matters children are exceedingly quick. They remember clearly whatever they see. I may give this to you as a warning. If at any time you feel, whether from inclination or sense of duty, as if you would give your wife a kiss, pray make sure that there are no children near about. Do not say, oh, they are just children, and ignore them. For their being just children is what makes them dangerous. They will note what you do and tell every one in the house, and everyone will believe whatever they say. Why? They are innocent children, you know. Between their accuracy and their imaginary innocence, you are left no foothold for your self-respect. In saying this I am having in mind mainly the younger people. I need not say that the warning applies even more strongly to elderly

people. If a child should say that an elderly husband kissed his elderly wife, all the people will be astounded and ask what had possessed these persons to behave in that way at such an age. Supposing that you who are reading this are an elderly husband, consider what a laughing-stock you will become.

Ammayya did this to me on one occasion. I used to take her to my house frequently for helping me and my wife to beguile an afternoon. When our own grandchildren are with us we have no difficulty in spending the time; but they are not always with us, and when they are away, the afternoons drag. So, I take a child from some neighbouring house and I and my wife play with it and spend the time. It is easy for us to imagine that it is one of our grandchildren. My wife is even fonder of children than I. I have found that she turns out more work when children are hanging round her neck and crying and bothering her than when the house is empty and she is all by herself. Having brought up a number of children she is unhappy when she has not some child to look after. She bore her first child when sixteen and has always till now had the charge of her own children or her children's children. Not only does she do more work when

the children are bothering her, she even feels more restful.

Once when I had taken Ammayya to my house in this way, a thing happened. It was three in the afternoon and I was lying full length upon my mat. My wife came and sat at some little distance, combing her hair. I said to her for fun : "Why don't you comb my hair also?" She said: "What is the great object of combing your hair?" I said: "The pity of it is, you are my first and only wife. As I have grown old, you have also grown old, and you feel no need to think of me. Supposing it was a second wife or a third one, would she have neglected me as you are doing?" "Well," said my wife, "To-day you feel as if you would have your hair combed, tomorrow you might feel as if you would have a second wife." She smiled saying it and seemed exceedingly charming. I remember how my mother looked in her old age. My wife has all the grave charm that my mother had, and along with that a certain playfulness that we generally associate with a girl of sixteen. I said: "I find it hard enough to quell the two cats that frequently quarrel in our house. If I should bring another woman into it and you two should begin to quarrel, what is to happen to me?" Saying

this, I moved up to my wife and playfully gave her a kiss.

Ammayya was looking on. She did not know that I meant well by her adopted grandmother. She thought I was doing some harm and lifted her hand as if to beat me and said: "Eh, eh, do not hurt grannie." Then she saw that I did no harm, and sat down again, thinking no doubt that it was because of her threat that I desisted from hurting her grand-mother.

What is all this for, do you say? You will know presently.

The festival of lights is for young people the only real festival. If you are married, you know why I say so. Ask yourself if there is any festival to equal it and you will find there really is none. Especially, there is never any festival to equal the first festival in which you visited the house of your father-in-law. There are various reasons for this. In the first place, you are a grand person and the chief guest in the house of the man whose daughter you have married. In the second place, you have a chance of conducting yourself before your girl wife as the great person you are. In the third place, only provided you are sufficiently enterprising, you have a chance of speaking to that wife, or, at the least,

of stopping her in some narrow passage in the house and trying to speak. Altogether, in the life of every young man among our people, the festival of lights is a festival of passing importance.

I am of course referring to people of the old way of life. What I say may not apply to people of the new style who are too civilized to have the needs and impulses of the life that we lived. The boy and girl of these days will have spoken to each other even before marriage. What would they know of our way of life in which the exchange of the first words was an event of first-rate importance: like the establishment of friendly or other relations between two sovereign states? Besides, for some reason, the grandeur of son-in-law-dom has declined in these days. What else would you expect? A son-in-law nowadays does not object to stay in his father-in-law's house for a year together. How can any fellow, though never so young, be grand for a whole year? Almost the only person who might fear him for an entire year is the poor mother-in-law. If our young fellows took the advice which their wives give them indirectly in the days of the marriage ceremony, they would not commit the mistake of staying with their parents-in-law for such length

of time. For what do the humorous verses repeated by our girls say? "If you come to your mother-in-law's house and wish to have a pleasant time, stay for three days and leave on the fourth." Our boys stay not for three days but for three years. How can the stay be pleasant, much less grand?

Rangappa's festival was of the old style. Before that first festival of lights in which he went to his father-in-law's house, he had not exchanged words with his wife. It is true that on the day of the marriage, going with his wife from the wedding seat to the shrine in the house for jointly adoring God, he seemed to try to talk to her and make her talk. He could not do this when sitting on the wedding seat for the ceremony; later also, with other people standing around, there was no chance. The only chance that the bride-groom has of trying this kind of thing is when he catches the poor bride alone somewhere or other. One of these very rare occasions is when you are taking your wife to the shrine. People who watched Rangappa then could see his lips moving though the voice was not audible. Ratnamma, however, though she might have heard the muttering of her eager husband, kept her mouth shut. No doll could have had more motionless lips. I asked

Rangappa later what it was he was saying to his wife.

"When?"

"When you were taking her to the shrine. I thought your lips were moving and you were saying something to her."

"What am I to say to her? You know these girls. I told you long ago. Supposing I said something, how was she to understand?"

"That is, Ratna is not a grown-up girl like Shakuntala. That is the trouble."

"It is the trouble," said Rangappa.

I understood that he had said something and had received no response.

Going to the festival of lights, Rangappa was full of spirits. Ratnamma lived in her uncle's house. When Rangappa and his party went to Ratna's house, the girl was standing in the garden beside the house. You may be sure that she was full of expectancy and that her heart went fast when she heard the sound of the carriage. She had seen Rangappa first when she was singing the song about Krishna in my house. That was before marriage. In the marriage, sitting on the wedding seat, she had stolen looks at him some few times when she thought that no one was watching.

After that, this was the first occasion when she would be seeing him. The poor thing treasured the incidents of her marriage, detail after detail, in her memory. It delighted her to think of her husband and herself sitting beside each other and playing with flowers. When the priest asked her husband to call her 'daughter of the mother-in-law,' his mother had told him to call her 'daughter of donkey.' Whatever for the words for these, mother-in-law and donkey, rhyme in Kannada I do not know, but they do. This is the usual humour, but it is new in every marriage. Ratnamma was angry at being called daughter of a donkey ; so she returned the compliment by describing her husband as a very ugly man. He smiled bitterly and she felt that she had punished him for having called her daughter of a donkey. But he went on with the play with flowers and thus, without a single moment of real talk between them and in a huge crowd, they had dealt in love. During all those days Ratna had been aware of nothing but the young man she was marrying. The whole house seemed full of him and of thoughts of him. Without doubt that was the case with the boy too : he was aware only of the girl he was marrying and the house to him seemed full of her and of the thought of her.

Though she knew who was coming, Ratnamma walked up to the door of the house as though she did not know. Her mother-in-law got down from the carriage first, then Rangappa, and then the others. If Ratnamma came to make sure who had come, should she not have gone in immediately after seeing the mother-in-law? No, she stayed there until Rangappa got down, and went in thereafter. The young man had seen her even as she was in the garden. There was a grape plant in the garden. It had grown well and spread and was hanging down from its supports. The creepers were long and tender and played in the wind. There, like a creeper amidst those creepers, with limbs which in tenderness laughed at the tender shoots of the grape and with movements graceful like the swaying of the shoots, he first noticed the girl standing. He noticed too her walking from there to the door of the house. He saw her still there when he got down and knew that she cared for him and said to himself that he would try his best to make her speak to him this time.

That evening when they were seated together for receiving the blessings of the elders, Rangappa saw that Ratnamma would not sit close to him. She sat as far as she could on the very edge of the

seat. Her aunt and his mother and all the other ladies who had gathered tried ever so much to persuade her to sit nearer, but she would not. "Perhaps she does not like to sit near me. I shall go," said Rangappa, and got up. Then she moved a little nearer. Whether she moved nearer for fear her husband would go away or for the other fear that, if he did go away, the assembly would blame her for obstinacy, I am unable to say. The probability is that she wanted him to stay. So, moving a very little nearer in several stages, she reduced the distance between him and herself.

Rangappa was vexed beyond measure. He really thought that he would have punished her properly only if he went away, but he did not go. And why?

Rama and Bhima are going to school together. Rama has in his pocket a quantity of fried grain. Bhima's pocket is empty.

"What is it in your pocket, Ramu?"

"Nothing very much. A little fried grain."

"Ramu, let us not give it to any one else; only we two shall eat it."

"But you cannot eat, you know. I put the remnant of my eating into it and no one else can eat it."

"Oh, I do not mind eating the remnants of what you eat."

"But really, I cannot give you any of it."

"In that case, I shall give up friendship with you and go away."

"Well, give it up and go."

Bhima has Rama's permission to give up friendship and go away, but he does not give it up and go. He stays on and, moving somewhere near about, tries to resume relations with Rama. He wants the fried grain.

Rangappa did not go away for the same reason. He, like Bhima, had desire. Ratnamma was like Ramu who has the fried grain.

Rangappa and Ratnamma sat like this before the company for a long time. When the function was over, Rangappa left the place in disgust and walked to his room and thought over things. What nonsense is this, he said to himself. With what enthusiasm he had come from his village to meet this wife and how badly she was behaving! For whom had he come? Was it not on her account? To see her and speak to her? Why did she not feel to him as he was feeling to her? As he had said previously, it was a silly girl, her mother's milk not yet dry on her lips. But then,

what had to be done now? Having come, he should make further efforts to meet her and talk to her.

Sitting in his room, Rangappa noticed that Ratnamma passed in front of his door to go to the next room which was hers. He heard also the sounds of her removing the jewels. He therefore strengthened his resolve as a lancer twirls his moustache and walked quickly into the other room. "I shall go and speak to her," he said within himself, walking up, "and if she does not reply, I shall abuse her and leave." The room was not very well lit. There, near the window, stood Ratnamma. Hearing his step, she turned round. Who was it there? Rangappa!

You have read the story of the Cow and the Tiger; I mean the honest cow which the tiger stopped on its way to its calf and so on. "As the cow was passing home, came along the tiger king!" That is the text. Now did Rangappa seem to Ratnamma as the tiger king who came along seemed to the helpless cow? Or did he not? I can hardly tell you. In any case, Ratnamma just turned her face away again, so that he could not make out whether his coming pleased her or the contrary.

Rangappa walked slowly up to where Ratnamma was, and standing beside her, looked

at her face. Her body all ornaments and her face all eyes, Ratna was fragrant with the sandal which, a few minutes earlier in the assembly, he had offered to her as a courtesy. The charm of her looks was past description. What happened to his anger? Rangappa spoke with tremulous tenderness.

“Why do you not speak to me?”

There was no answer.

“Are you angry with me for any reason?”

What folly! They had not yet opened their eyes to life and he was asking her if she was angry with him.

“Will you not speak to me?”

No answer.

Rangappa was afraid that somebody might drop in and their colloquy might end. There might not be much time and yet this girl was mute.

“Very well, I shall be going.” With these words Rangappa walked a step back. Ratnamma then turned her head towards him a little and looked at him. Rangappa did not really wish to go away; and his goddess had become gracious and turned towards him. How could he throw away this chance after all the trouble he had

taken? So, he retraced his step and stood near Ratnamma.

"Will you not speak to me?"

"Why would I not speak to you?"

The goddess had put a question in reply to his question.

Rangappa's delight was beyond all bounds. Why? His wife had spoken to him. What is the illusion in life that so blurs our vision? How many marriages should have taken place in this world till now? And yet each man who has married, on the occasion of his wife's speaking to him for the first time, has felt as if he had come into the possession of an empire. What will each man's wife do but speak to him? She is made to speak to him and it is only proper that she should. Indeed, no one can escape the fate. Again, whatever may be the position until the wife does speak, there is never any lack of speaking after that, as men know and have always said. And yet, look at any young fellow and on the day of his wife's saying some words to him for the first time, he is floating on a sea of joy. I have heard of Socrates, the philosopher, and his wife who poured filthy water on his erudite head in quarrel and abused him to enforce her argument. Did this poor philosopher also on the day

on which this termagant uttered a few words to him for the first time, feel that he was floating on a sea of joy? Who knows?

Rangappa answered Ratnamma's question. "Then, why did you not give a reply earlier?"

"You came to the house in the morning and have thought of seeing me and speaking to me only now. Why could you not think of me earlier?"

Rangappa was bowled over. He thought that she was a simple girl and he was the hero and he could blame her for not being as forward as he. But it looked as if he was not forward enough. This is the way of the world. As the poet has said: "You think it a ruby and grasp it, but find it is live coal." Well, he had been beaten. But he felt strange pleasure in being vanquished. If you have a pretty wife, and she, while still young, acts the loving one and blames you for not being sufficiently attentive, you will experience the joy that Rangappa had that moment. That joy brightened that festival for him more than all the lights of the carnival without.

Now, you young people who are hearing this story will no doubt believe what I say. I am therefore very careful not to say anything that is not true and correct. I have therefore to verify details and so asked Ratnamma one day, telling

her of this, if it was all correct. Rangappa was standing by and smiling.

"Go away," said Ratnamma. "You surely have better business."

"Well, you can, if you like, say it is correct. Otherwise you may be silent, and I shall know what to think."

"How did you get all this story? I wonder who talks of these funny things to you."

"I shall tell you who. It was Ammayya."

"Oh, Ammayya. I suppose you do not know how accurate Ammayya is. Come to Rama Bhatta's house tomorrow and you will know the kind of story that gets about because of her."

Next day I went to Rama Bhatta's house. It was late in the afternoon. As usual the young women of our households had gathered there, helping one another in braiding their hair and were talking. Nowadays these afternoon parties have been given up. I think it is a pity. In the town, neighbours live as strangers and do not meet unless there is some reason. So girls have developed the habit of spending the afternoons reading some book. Those who do not know English may read some story of ours; those who know English read anything that comes to their

hands, any story or detective novel. In some of our villages the old custom persists. I think it ought to become more common. That day I walked to Rama Bhatta's house and stood near the door to hear what they were talking about.

One of the young women said: "It seems he asked her to comb his hair."

Another said: "His straggling gray hair! What a fashionable old man!"

A third one said: "Yes, but did you not hear, the wife refused to do it. So the old man was angry and said that he would marry another wife and went to beat the poor woman."

The first one said: "What a shame! Are people going to marry second wives hereafter at sixty years of age to comb their hair and plait it and put a fine coat on their person and send them out to the street as if they were little boys?"

One of the elder ladies said: "What girls you are! Who told you all these things?"

"It seems Ammayya saw it all with her own eyes."

"Oh, you silly girls, what talk is this? What does that innocent thing know? She says something and you understand something else, and you have been laughing at that old man the whole afternoon. Come, talk of something else."

At this point, I called out "Rama Bhatta." The voices ceased and, like scurrying mice, three or four of the young women got up and ran in. I walked in to the company. They were all smiling. I am an old man and may be forgiven some freedom: I have never seen flowers to beat a smile on the face of a woman young or old. It should have struck the ladies as a strange coincidence that I should have walked in just as they were speaking of me. An old lady said to me, "He is not at home," meaning Rama Bhatta. "Oh," I said: "I thought so from the noise the girls were making."

I was really not as vexed as I pretended to be. In fact, I was not vexed at all. Ratnamma had organised the discussion to show the way in which Ammayya disclosed the things she heard and saw. Far from proving her inaccuracy, what I had overheard showed that in substance her reports were reliable. Besides, I felt really happy that something I had done had provided matter for discussion to our young women for an afternoon and caused them so much harmless amusement. Indeed, I have always wished to think of life in this way. It is for this reason I have told you today of Rangappa's festival of lights. If it has given you some little pleasure, I am very well rewarded.

THAT WOMAN

The woman was a beauty. There was no denying it and most of the people in the Railway Station were looking at her. The crowd in the station was rather large that day. So, she stood at one end and was looking this way and that as if she were hoping to see some one whom she was expecting. On the ground near her were a small box and a bundle of clothing. The woman looked as if she was a little upset by the unusual size of the crowd and this rather seemed to add to her grace. There are various types of men in a crowd in a Railway Station. Some come to go on a journey ; some to meet people who might be arriving by a train ; others merely to see and be seen by others, preferably the women. This last class desire to give every one an opportunity of looking at them. So, they move up and down the platform and occasionally stand for a little while over against the women's compartments. To see if they have to go on standing a little longer, they look at the compartments occasionally. That particular day, the people who had come for seeing and being seen noticed this woman sure enough and moved somewhere near about her. One or two of them, with greater courage than the rest, moved even nearer and brushed against her,

pretending to be unaware of the fact in the hurry of their business. The woman was fully alive to all this and was moving half a step this way and half a step that and making the heart of these lovers of adventure go faster.

The people who had come for adventure could do all this without coming to harm; but those who had come for business were not as safe. One of these latter walked up to the Booking Office window and gave a currency note to the Booking Clerk and asked for a number of tickets to some station. He knew that he would have to give three rupees and fifteen annas and the clerk should return a rupee and an anna to him. He had his hand in the window for the tickets and the change but, anxious to feast his eyes while he could, he had his head turned towards this woman. The clerk put the tickets and some money into his hand and said: "Now, make room, sir; three tickets and a rupee and an anna." In his unwillingness to turn away from the woman even for a moment, this man took out his hand without verifying what was put into it. Coming out some distance and wishing to pay the porter for carrying luggage, he looked at his cash. He found he held a six-pie coin and an anna coin. The six-pie coin being the same size as the rupee coin the

Booking Clerk had put it into his hand to make him feel it was a rupee. The man was very angry at being thus bamboozled and walked up to the booking window again and said: "You have given me a six-pie coin instead of a rupee." The Booking Clerk was a man from another part of the country. He might have spoken our language, but preferred not to, at the moment. He spoke in his own language and spoke so fast and vigorously that our friend of the lost rupee understood nothing of what he was saying. But still he thought: "The man is speaking so much; he might explain what happened and give me the money." So he waited until the torrent of words ended; but the money did not come. Our friend tried to shout: the Booking Clerk said he would call the policemen to have him kicked out.

By this time, Sreenivasaiya came into the Railway Station. Our friend of the lost rupee saw Sreenivasaiya and, as he looked like a person of some importance, wearing good clothes and with laced turban, he walked up to him and said: "See, sir, this Booking Clerk has put a six-pie coin into my hand instead of a rupee and has cheated me." The Booking Clerk also spoke to Sreenivasaiya: "Good morning, sir, come in, sir, where do you wish to go, sir?" The Booking Clerk

did not know Sreenivasaiya, but then, any Booking Clerk can offer these courtesies to a person of importance and become his equal. Sreenivasaiya walked into the clerk's room. The clerk said to him: "You see, sir, that fellow who is complaining to you: you know the fellow is a fool. See there, sir; you see a woman standing there. He was looking at her and keeping his hand inside the window: I put the money all right into his hand and he pulled it out. While he was doing it, some one must have taken away the rupee, if, indeed, he has lost the rupee, and put a six-pie coin there. He notices this five minutes afterwards and says that I put the six-pie coin." Making this report to Sreenivasaiya, the clerk addressed a number of powerful English words of abuse to our friend of the lost rupee. This friend had beaten a retreat as soon as the clerk told Sreenivasaiya that he had been looking at a woman and been careless. The poor fellow saw that he was at a disadvantage and possibly realised that after all he could not look at a stranger woman and also avoid the loss of a rupee. This is wisdom that comes to us occasionally in this way.

The Booking Clerk's speech directed Sreenivasaiya's attention towards the woman. He felt as if he had seen her somewhere, but he could not

recollect where. As he turned to look at her, Sreenivasaiya noticed that the woman also was looking at him. Some of our gentlemen at large were moving near about her and Sreenivasaiya was hurt to see that a woman should be unable to come to a station without suffering these improper attentions from every villain. He said to the clerk: "Who is that lady?" "I don't know," replied the man. "She has been there this half hour. It looks as if she expected to meet somebody but nobody has come!"

Sreenivasaiya had a tender heart. He saw that the woman was young and handsome. She looked like having no one to help her. He noticed that the scoundrels of the place were moving about her like hungry dogs near an oblation. Sreenivasaiya was naturally modest, even shy; but how could he desist from asking the lady if she needed help? If someone else had been there and walked up to her and rendered help, he would have felt glad and walked away without thinking further about her; but here it looked as if she had no one to look after her: so, he walked up to the woman and said: "Have you anyone to help you, madam?"

The woman adjusted her cloth, bent her head in shyness, pressed the ground with her toe and,

playing it about, said in a very low and sweet voice, "No".

She seemed to Sreenivasaiya to speak with great modesty and reserve. Seeing her fumble with her upper cloth, Sreenivasaiya thought that he should have upset her by being too familiar. Not knowing, however, what to do now, he said: "Where do you wish to go?"

Sreenivasaiya was innocent of the movements which the woman was executing. Indeed, he did not notice exactly what she was doing. Was she really covering herself more fully or was she angry that the cloth was concealing the beauty of her person? The result of the adjustment was that the train of her saree dropped and more of the body was seen. The woman did not seem to be troubled by this so as to adjust the cloth better. As Sreenivasaiya was keeping his face down in modesty, she was looking at him fairly straight. She seemed to feel that while she who should be shy was courageous, this man was playing the part of a woman. Possibly because he had his head down and it was the same whether her beauty was covered or not she pulled up the end of the saree and awaited developments.

Sreenivasaiya noticed none of these things. The men of taste, noticing the somewhat

important-looking man approach the woman, had moved away to a distance. Noticing, however, that this man felt no great interest in the woman, they felt a little hopeful again and were watching the two. Sreenivasaiya asked the woman : "Where do you wish to go to, madam?" and she said: "To Mayilur".

If I say Bangalore, Mysore people will be vexed ; if I say Mysore, the people of Bangalore will feel that I have done them harm. Therefore I am writing the name of the place to which the woman wished to go as " Mayilur ".

Sreenivasaiya said : " Is that so ? I am also going to Mayilur. I shall buy you a ticket ; pray stay here : " and he went to the Booking Clerk and bought two tickets both for the second class.

Our friend of the lost rupee was watching all this. " If a woman that is helpless is to be picked up, why should she be picked up by this man rather than myself ? " he thought. Merely because this man looked important and wore good clothes, had he a better right to a helpless woman than he who had lost a rupee on her account ? Surely, the man who cared enough for her to have lost a rupee had the better title. So he determined that, even if it cost him another rupee or

two, he would not yield her to Sreenivasaiya. He made up his mind, therefore, to travel in the same compartment with them and went to the booking window and paid the excess and bought a second class ticket himself.

The train arrived. There was much fuss at the moment of getting into it. There were only two second-class compartments in the train. Sreenivasaiya took the woman to one of them and seated her there and himself walked up to the other. Just then he noticed that our friend of the lost rupee was trying to get into the compartment in which the woman was seated and called out to him and said: "I say, come and sit in this compartment."

Our friend said: "Sir, I choose to sit in this compartment."

Sreenivasaiya said: "No, sir, you cannot get into that compartment. You should sit here."

Our friend said: "That is all right, sir. How does it matter to you? I did not pay two rupees extra to look at your beautiful face!"

Sreenivasaiya got quite angry. This fellow was insisting upon getting into a compartment in which a woman was travelling alone! How dare he? And then his insulting reference to Srinivasaiya's face! So, Srinivasaiya went to the

Station Master and told him : "This man is a scoundrel : he is trying to get into a woman's compartment : please tell him to travel in the other compartment." The matter necessarily came up for discussion. Our friend of the lost rupee said : "When the lady does not object, what is the objection of this gentleman?" But then, how were they to say that the lady did not object ? The Station Master could not very well go and ask the woman whether a particular man might or might not travel with her. As the train had been already delayed five minutes the Station Master shortened the discussion and, pushing our friend of the lost rupee into Sreenivasaiya's compartment, whistled for the train to leave. So, finally, all that our friend of the lost rupee could get for the extra two rupees that he spent was the privilege of seeing the not very pretty face of Sreenivasaiya. When the train had gone, the Booking Clerk walked up to the Station Master and said : "See, how many people lose their heads on account of a woman ? That fellow of the laced turban is a grown-up child and a first class fool. The other fellow, who bought a second-class ticket thinking that he would be able to travel with these two in the same compartment, is a super fool. I should have been another ; but, fortunately, God came to my help !"

“What did you do?” said the Station Master :
“You did not lose any money !”

“Well,” said the Booking Clerk, “It was nothing very serious, but might quite easily have been worse. I was looking at that woman as I was issuing the tickets. In giving three pies to a fellow, I handed over a half-rupee coin. I discovered it too late to take it back from him and was feeling that I had been fined seven annas nine pies for the folly of looking at the woman instead of minding my business ; but it occurred to me the next minute that, if I had been a fool another man could be. Sure enough this fellow came along and gave the cash and took the cash, looking at the woman all the time. I gave him a six-pie instead of a rupee and made up the loss. After all, if you have God’s grace you can repair the results of your folly as soon as you realise it. Supposing I had not lost the seven annas nine pies, I might not have thought of this particular way of making money and gained fifteen annas six-pies. All the same, it is a pity that I had to lose seven annas and three quarters out of what might have been a gain of fifteen annas and a half.”

Here in the train our amorous friend’s mind was full of anger and desire. Sreenivasaiya’s

mind was full of anger and anxiety. The woman's mind was full of expectation and dissatisfaction. How?

"Why did this man come and interfere when I wished to travel in the same compartment with the woman?" thought our amorous friend, filling himself with resentment against Sreenivasaiya. Though he had not bought a costly ticket for getting a sight of what he called "the pretty face" of Sreenivasaiya, our friend for some time looked at nothing else. He stared steadily at that face thinking that, if Sreenivasaiya should by any chance talk of the matter again, he should make it the occasion for even assaulting him. He was, however, disappointed. For, Sreenivasaiya would take no notice of him. When this plan failed our amorous friend said to himself: "How does it matter if this fellow came in the way here? I am going to her tonight" and, hoping partly that he might be able to get a glimpse of her through the window, he put his head out and looked in the direction of the next compartment.

The thoughts of Sreenivasaiya were of a far different kind. What was clear to our amorous friend and to no doubt a large number of our dear readers was not clear to the insufficiently

educated mind of Sreenivasaiya. "This poor woman", he was saying to himself, "poor thing, what trouble she was in! It is true that some good people in the Railway Station would have seen that she came to no harm. Yet these good people would greatly hesitate to go and speak to her. Somehow it is only the bad people that feel no hesitation in accosting a stranger woman. Goodness is often ineffective because of such hesitation. Why should goodness have this hesitation? The good man does not hesitate to do good. He is afraid to do something which though good looks like evil. A good fellow wishing to give a coin to a beggar looks round to see that no one is watching. He is afraid of seeming to do it for show. You may do any good action you like. It is possible for people to misrepresent it as done from a wrong motive. For example, the thing he had done that day; his going and accosting the lady and his buying a second class ticket for her. How would these things have looked to people who were watching? Indeed, he might have to help her even at Mayilur Station and take her to her house. How would it all look? Somehow he had got into an awkward situation". This was the train of Sreenivasaiya's thoughts.

“What a silly fellow!” you perhaps think, and undoubtedly, dear reader, Sreenivasaiya was lacking in wisdom of a sort. He had not developed the easy ways that we, modern youth, consider proper in talking to women. Sreenivasaiya and people of his day grew up in the tradition which held Lakshmana as the ideal. That brother-in-law could not recognise the ornaments his sister-in-law wore on her arms or in her ear but only those that she wore on her feet. Do you know how far this principle had affected Sreenivasaiya? Because of this idealism the police had given up standing attention to him. One day as he was walking along on the road, Kuppanna, a constable with some experience, stood easy taking no notice. Hutchanna, a new constable, said to him; “What is this, brother, should you not stand at attention?” Kuppanna said: “Attention to whom? And why?” Said Hutchanna: “He should be an officer; he wears a good suit; and see his lace turban”. Kuppanna said: “How does that matter? The fellow will not look at the face of the most handsome woman going in the street. What kind of officer is he?” Each man to his gods. Kuppanna should respect his ideals and Sreenivasaiya his. It was because Sreenivasaiya respected his own ideals that at this moment in the railway train his mind was full of thought.

You or I might not have thought so much in the same situation. But that would be because you and I are not like Sreenivasaiya.

In the woman's mind, I said, were expectation and disappointment. Why they were there will appear later.

When they had journeyed for some time in this way Mayilur arrived. Sreenivasaiya got down thinking that he would hand over his own things to his servant and then go to the woman's compartment to help. If some person had come for her he could leave her in his charge and go his way; otherwise he might have to put her into a conveyance and possibly take her home. Sreenivasaiya's servant had not come and there was a huge crowd and it took Sreenivasaiya quite a few minutes to get free of the porters and cartmen who thronged around him. When finally he was free and had given charge of his things to a man and walked to the next compartment, the woman was not there.

For the moment Sreenivasaiya said to himself that this was just as well. But the next moment he felt anxious for the woman. She had looked helpless in the starting station; what should be her condition in a place like this? But however keenly he looked round he could not sight her.

Finally he said to himself that some friends hers should have come and she should have accompanied them and himself went home.

When he had gone home there was not much room for thought of the woman. Talking of one thing or another to his wife and children and mother and thinking of his own business he ceased to be anxious for the stranger. Occasionally, however, in the course of the day, the mind would revert for half a moment to wondering who the woman might be and what might have happened to her.

It was about nine in the night. Sreenivasaiya had finished his meal and was sitting in the hall in his house, chewing betel. His servant came and said: "Someone wants you, sir". "Ask him to come in," said Sreenivasaiya. "He wants you outside, sir," said the servant; "he wishes to take you somewhere. Someone has sent word." Sreenivasaiya went out and saw the boy. It was not quite a boy either, for though there were no signs of age upon his face that face showed that he had passed boyhood. The messenger folded his hands to him and said: "I was asked to bring you". Sreenivasaiya asked: "Who asked you to bring me?" The messenger looked hard at Sreenivasaiya with both mouth and eyes open,

and turned towards the servant as if wondering whether he should answer the question. He turned again to Sreenivasaiya and winking just a little and lowering his voice said : " They ".

This made nothing clear to Sreenivasaiya except the messenger's stupidity. So he said again : " Who is ' they ' ? " The boy replied : " Who is ' they ' ? They. I was asked to bring you ". Sreenivasaiya then wondered if there was some mistake about who was to be brought. So he said : " Were you asked to bring me ? " " Certainly ", said the young man. " I was asked to bring the consettor. They said the face was pock-marked and you have pock marks ". " This fellow has begun to describe me ", thought Sreenivasaiya ; " what is the use of talking to him ? " He realised that it was he that was wanted though it was not clear by whom. In a final attempt to get the information he said : " If you name the person who wants me I shall come ; otherwise I will not come. " The messenger then again looked all round, put his hand against his mouth, approached Sreenivasaiya and, as if speaking into his ear, said : " Afternoon—train—Naga " and stopped short ; and withdrawing himself added : " you understand now ? " With this he gave Sreenivasaiya a wink.

"What people to send such a messenger!" thought Sreenivasaiya. "It is possible that it is the lady for whom I bought a ticket in the afternoon." So he asked the messenger: "Do you mean the lady for whom I bought a ticket?" The boy said, "Ah! that is it; if you know why do you ask me?" Sreenivasaiya himself had a desire to know that the lady was safe. So he put on his coat and his head-dress and went out with the messenger. He hired a vehicle on the way and drove nearly a mile with the man. Following the direction given he reached an upstairs house in a small street. The messenger got down and walked in asking Sreenivasaiya to follow.

Sreenivasaiya entered the front hall of the house with the youth; then went up some steps to the first floor and got into a hall. The messenger asked him to be seated on a chair and went away. Sreenivasaiya sat alone for a few minutes. It was a well-furnished hall. There were sofas, easy-chairs and beautiful tables in it. On one of the chairs was a tiger skin beautifully tanned and prepared. On the table was very superior baize. "These people are very well-to-do" thought Sreenivasaiya. Just then a woman walked in from one of the side doors of the hall, very well dressed and looking very attractive.

At the first glance Sreenivasaiya saw that it was the lady of the afternoon. Seeing the get-up however, even his unsuspecting mind conceived some question about her.

The woman approached Sreenivasaiya and sat on a chair at some distance and said: "Perhaps you are hurt at my free ways". Poor Sreenivasaiya did not know what to say or do. When a woman shows fear a man can preach courage; when she shows courage a man is but a whipped dog. But Sreenivasaiya had to make some reply. So he said: "I looked for you when I got down from the train to see if you needed help, but could not find you in the crowd. I suppose some friends had come or you were able to look after yourself".

The woman said: "That was so. It was because I came away without taking leave that I sent for you now". Within herself she said: "It was in order to send word for you now that I came away without taking leave then".

"It was enough for me that you reached home safe. There was no need to get me here to tell me this".

The woman said: "I wished to thank you for all the trouble you took on my account".

"Oh, no", said Sreenivasaiya. "As I said, the important thing was that you should reach home safe. But then, why did you travel alone in the train? It is always better to have some one with you".

"I had a companion. He brought me".

"But you told me there was no one when I asked you".

"I could have told you that you were there to look after me. But somehow I could not speak even a few words and said there was no one". Saying this the woman cast upon Sreenivasaiya a willing woman's—a willing public woman's—look.

All the blunder of which he had been guilty flashed upon Sreenivasaiya in a moment. A very little doubt, however, still remained. "Why was this woman behaving so? Was she in truth a public woman?" But one could not ask her the question. After a minute's silence he looked up and said: "Then I did you really some disservice in the afternoon".

The woman laughed a little and said: "In one sense. But if I can serve you now you have really done me great service".

Sreenivasaiya replied: "I am sorry I did not know. I thought that the others were doing

you harm and wished to protect you. I had no other idea in my mind”.

“Then it is my misfortune. It is not often that we get one like you to serve”.

“This house is a good one and, from what I can see, you live in some comfort”.

“Others give money for their pleasure and for their pleasure we live in a good house and wear good clothes and ornaments”.

Sreenivasaiya said: “That is true too”, and, looking at the woman for a moment steadily, got up saying: “Now I shall take leave”.

Sreenivasaiya looked at the woman's face steadily because it was bringing to his mind some face which he knew. Even in the afternoon that had been the case; but then he did not look at her long enough at any one time to be sure whose face it resembled. Now that he had sat near for some time and looked at her in talking, it seemed to him that the resemblance was to a face which he had known very well. But what face it was still eluded him. The woman misunderstood his steady look and said: “Sir, I am rather aged. But I have a daughter who is young and handsome. You may accept her services”.

Sreenivasaiya replied: “No madam, that was not why I looked at you. In fact, I see that

in coming here now I have made a mistake as in the afternoon in interfering". Then he put his hand into his pocket and took out a currency note and holding it out to her said: "If I had not come in the way you would no doubt have found some custom. I interfered and caused you loss".

"No, sir", said the woman: "I am in no need of money. I should be gratified if you accepted our services. But apart from that, this prosperity which you see around you is yours also".

Saying this the woman walked into a room and came out with a photograph. Sreenivasaiya felt a sudden spasm of fear.

The woman approached him and showed him the photograph. It was one of Sreenivasaiya's father.

The woman said: "This gentleman honoured my mother. If you pleased you could honour me". With this she knelt down to Sreenivasaiya's feet.

Sreenivasaiya was taken aback and stepped away a little.

The woman looked hurt and got up and said: "I am a fallen woman and you ought not even to touch me".

Sreenivasaiya came nearer, held her by the hand and took her to a chair and made her sit on it. And to show that he had no hesitation about touching her on the ground of her being a fallen woman bent down and kissed her lightly on the face. The woman's features relaxed with joy.

Sreenivasaiya said : " Now I shall take leave ".

The woman replied : " Is that all? Very well, then. But take something from me before you leave, as a memento of this meeting ".

Sreenivasaiya thought for a moment and in order to take something which was not too costly but was still worth possessing said : " Will you give me that photograph? "

The woman said : " Certainly, but take also something of value ".

" I do not want anything else. I shall be satisfied if I may take the photograph ".

" Very well, sir ; just as you like ".

Sreenivasaiya had until a few minutes before addressed her in the plural in courtesy. In the last few sentences he had called her in the familiar singular. The woman noticed this and said : " How is it that you have dropped the courtesy plural and are addressing me in the singular so soon? "

With the photograph in his hand and ready to start Sreenivasaiya said: "You are my sister; am I to stand on formalities?"

The word "sister" brought tears to the woman's eyes. When Sreenivasaiya left she dropped limp into her chair and with her head in her hand moaned to herself: "Sister! Sister! Where is that privilege and where am I? What I am destined to is this".

As Sreenivasaiya got out the youth who had acted as messenger joined him. Walking into the lower hall Sreenivasaiya noticed, peeping at him through the door-way, a young woman whose face was beautiful like the moon at full. On the moment Sreenivasaiya asked himself how Kamalu could be there. Kamalu was his daughter. She who had peeped was the daughter of the woman of the house. Recollecting himself Sreenivasaiya said: "Ah, what a pity is this and to what have we come!" When he went out the cart in which he had come was still standing. Sreenivasaiya sat in the cart and told the cartman to drive. As the man, in turning his cart, moved it a little backwards, it came close to a person who was walking up the street. The person was drunk and very joyous and somewhat unsteady on the feet. He said: "You cartman, damn you. Have you no

sense?" The cartman by long practice had developed the feeling that his offence would diminish if he made his passenger a party in a quarrel. He said: "Don't talk of sense and senseless. Our master in the cart here is not less senseless than you". The cartman was a simple fellow. He should have said, if at all, "more senseless" or "less sense", but got mixed up. He had more devotion than skill in the service of his master for the time being.

The other man, under the influence of liquor, got quite angry. "Shut up" he said. "Do you say he is not less senseless? Come on now, I shall show you that he is", and turning to Sreenivasaiya said: "Come out, my gent, I shall show you that you are". Sreenivasaiya made out by the light of the street lamp who this man was and said to the cartman: "Now, get along". The man in the street also recognised the passenger in the cart and said: "Ah, the scoundrel, did he come here too?" and stepped back. The cart drove away. The man in the street was our amorous friend of the afternoon.

Sreenivasaiya's mind had by this time got completely perturbed by a series of agitating thoughts. He remembered his father and his life. That father had lived happy in a village for many

years. In a journey to Mayilur once he made the acquaintance of the mother of this woman of the afternoon's adventure. He had become so infatuated with her that he had left the village and come and settled down in Mayilur and handed over to her more than three quarters of the property which he had inherited. The infatuation for the woman of Mayilur had been the cause of endless unhappiness in the family. Sreenivasaiya had grown up with a feeling of detestation for the irregular love which had ruined his father's life. But now it seemed detestable to him for an additional reason. That reason was that it had made his sister a prostitute. Sister? Well, what is that relationship which we call sister? A woman is your sister if her body and your body have derived from the same father, or mother. And had not that occurred in this case? Supposing this woman had been born in his father's household, she would have been called Sreenivasaiya's sister and grown up in certain surroundings. The father had been thoughtless and the consequence was that Sreenivasaiya's sister was born in other surroundings and had grown up to another way of life. "What a pity! What a pity!" thought Sreenivasaiya. If this father had lived and seen this woman to-day would he have had the same

feeling as Sreenivasaiya? Sreenivasaiya wondered, but how can one help thinking in this way? If nothing else made him think so there was that resemblance of faces. We go to a public woman and get a child, yet feel that our household lives in decency. We walk with head erect and are proud that our daughters are brought up to be honest. What is this but ignorance and folly? Is it enough if your daughter in one house is brought up to be honest when your daughter in another house is brought up to be a prostitute? Whoever said that it was sufficient to be a gentleman in Bangalore but unnecessary to be that in Mysore? Those who go to a public woman and beget children in her house do not realise this. When Sreenivasaiya reached home he was perturbed beyond understanding by this thought.

That sister-yet-no-sister of his, in her beautiful house, was at first also unhappy. In a few moments, however, she felt happy to think that he had followed his own good way in life. Something in her nature made it possible for her to feel that he was her brother and she his sister. What more she might have said to herself and what other thoughts might have flowed into her mind we cannot say. The messenger boy broke in on her contemplation with a look on his face

that made the woman think that Sreenivasaiya might have come again. The woman said to herself: "I shall prostrate myself before my brother. Let the dust of his feet touch my head and make this sinful body pure". She got up with this thought and saw that the man whom the messenger boy brought in was not Sreenivasaiya but our amorous friend of the afternoon. For a moment but only for a moment she was surprised.

Our amorous friend walked in like a conquering hero, twirling his moustache. Not awaiting welcome or invitation to be seated he walked up to a chair and sat, and looking at the woman with an air of possession said: "See; was I to be put off? Not for him or his father. What a scoundrel! He had come here also? How sanctimonious he looks, the practised rogue".

The woman's face had now lost all traces of distress. She was again smiling and looking happy. She came near our friend and said: "I was wondering why you did not come. Why should you think of him, the poor simpleton?" And with a graceful gesture she took our amorous friend by the hand and led him in. Looking like a king whom victory had crowned, the visitor played with his moustache and followed her, seeing

in a tall mirror which was on the way a full length reflection of himself.

The messenger boy was delighted beyond measure at our friend's ways. They seemed to him to be in such strange and noble contrast with the ways of the puritan or simpleton who had been sitting in the room a few minutes previously. "That's right", he said to himself. "This is the man for me. 'Sister' says he, what a fool!" The boy thought the best he could; again, each man to his god.

"Simpleton" and "fool". Could the woman who one moment thought of her brother in approval and worshipped him as a hero have called him simpleton the next moment? Was her attitude no better than the attitude of this servant of hers? Which of them was the real outlook of the woman? Why do we ask? Is it not possible that both are real? The eye sees a great light written bright on the sky and says that moment: "I have seen real light this moment. The purpose for which I possess vision is fulfilled. I desire nothing more". It gives up that moment its power to see, but it does that only for a moment. The next moment it sees the old commonplace things again, recognizes them and attends to its routine duties as ever before. The mind is not

different. It sees unusual goodness sometimes and loses itself in admiration of that goodness. The next moment it gets free of that admiration. Where is the sense in asking that one should lose one's heart for ever to something that appears only for a moment? If this were demanded, our world of work would come to an end. Let us not blame the attitude that reverts to the commonplace even after feeling the grandeur of unusual goodness. Let us rather be grateful that we recognize the good when we see it though it is so unusual. May this power dwell in us for ever!

Nagarathna, the public woman, therefore, attended with pleasure to our amorous friend in her beautiful house in that crowded lane in the city. Sreenivasaiya in that hour lay asleep in his house with his wife and children. He saw that sister in his dream but there she was a sister born in his house whom after his father's death he had married to a young man of respectable birth among his relatives. When that young man, in the dream, came to Sreenivasaiya to take his sister home, Sreenivasaiya felt infinitely happy and arranged a dinner.

THE SHAH'S JUDGMENT

Shah Abbas had a great reputation as a wise and just judge. Often in important disputes between his subjects, he himself undertook to give a decision and on such occasions the populace would gather in large numbers to hear him. He was a Muslim, but his territory included population of other religions. That a party in dispute was a Muslim or non-Muslim never affected the Shah's outlook. Some Mussalmans of the territory were vexed with the Shah on this account; but the greater part of the population including the Muslim community appreciated the ruler's impartiality. The more sensible among the Mussalmans openly praised the Prince for being so just and treating the Christians and the Jews of the kingdom even as he treated themselves. Along with a passion for justice, the Shah had a rare capacity for seeing through many obstacles the truth hidden behind. Quite often he discovered the facts of a case through means which had occurred to no other person and astonished people. Occasions of his giving a decision had thus become a matter of public interest. The Shah himself had a feeling that the greater the confidence of the populace in his sense of justice and ability to dispense it, the greater would be its devotion to him. He desired

for this reason to give all his people the chance of seeing him dispensing justice and had ordered that whoever wished to be present should be admitted into the Royal Hall of Justice.

One particular day the people gathered in larger numbers than ever, for the Shah was delivering judgment in a dispute that had arisen between Yusuf Khan and Johan Mathias. Yusuf was a Muslim ; Mathias a Christian. Yet the two had been partners in business for years together till they fell out a little time previously. As is usual between merchants, they had trusted each other entirely, merely noting down what each brought in or took out or spent on his own behalf or on behalf of the other. Thus it had gone on for a long time, but, suddenly, one day Yusuf had raised some quarrel and it had become necessary for the two to settle their affairs and separate. When they saw the accounts, it appeared that Yusuf had to make a payment to Mathias. Yusuf did not accept this conclusion. It was a question of some lakhs of silver and therefore important enough to be taken to the Shah. The Shah heard them and said : " You two are responsible people. What is the need for my interference ? Here's our Cadi Fazl Beig. He will settle your dispute. Cadi, will you kindly look through the accounts

of these people and arbitrate? Yusuf and Mathias, each of you should bring all the papers you have to prove your contentions and hand them over once for all to the Cadi. You should not say later that you forgot to hand over this or that paper. Put all your papers into this bag. I shall seal the bag and then the Cadi will go through them and give his decision. Do you agree?" Mathias agreed. Fazl Beig was known to be as impartial as the Shah himself. No other Judge was held in as high esteem as he. Yusuf of course agreed. Both sides brought their papers and put them all into a bag in the presence of the Shah and locked it. The Shah put his seal on the locks and handed over the bag to the Judge. Some days later, the Judge gave his decision and it went against Mathias. Mathias did not accept the decision and had approached the Shah in appeal. The appeal was to be heard today and it had been announced that the Shah was holding his court in the Royal Hall of Justice and the people had gathered in numbers.

As the people were talking miscellaneously about the dispute, the Shah arrived and took his seat. The whole assemblage bent in homage to him. The Shah accepted the greeting, returned the courtesy due to persons of each status, asked

the peers to sit in their places and then asked: "Is Cadi Fazl Beig present?" The Cadi got up from his place and made reverence. The Shah asked him to be seated again and said: "Yusuf Khan and Johan Mathias, come forward". The order was communicated and the parties came up. "Mathias", said the Shah, "what is your contention?"

"My Lord King," said Mathias, "I am a ruined man. While the fact is that Yusuf should give me a great deal of money, the decision makes it out that I have to pay him large amounts. Justice has failed in this case."

"I suppose the decision has been based upon the accounts which you furnished!"

"Sire, no. The Judge says that, whether according to Yusuf's accounts or mine, money is due from me to Yusuf. This is not correct. Whatever might be the result of the accounts given by Yusuf, the accounts that I gave should have shown clearly that money was due to me."

"You know, I suppose, that Cadi Fazl Beig's judgment has never been questioned so far?"

"That is true, sire. Not only has it not been questioned so far, I do not see why it should be questioned hereafter either. He is a

just man. I am only urging that I have not received justice."

"Were you not both there when the Judge took out the papers to examine your claims?"

"Yes, sire".

"Was not our seal intact? I had shown you the seal."

"It was intact, sire."

"Mathias, please understand what you are saying. I put my seal on the locks, after you had put in your papers. The seal was intact when the Judge opened the bag in your presence. How could the papers have changed, or, if they were in your favour and if Fazl Beig is a just man, how could the decision based on them be against you? What are you suggesting? How could the papers have changed? It is impossible!"

"Sire, it was not possible to change the papers, but they have changed."

"Mathias, are you suggesting that we allowed the papers to be changed and the bag to be sealed again? Do you think that your ruler is capable of such an act because you are a Christian and your opponent is a Mussalman?"

"Sire," cried Mathias, "I am a slave in the presence of Your Majesty. Why shall I think

harm of you or of your Judge? I know that I am ruined and the how and the wherefore I am unable to think out. If in my distress I have said anything to suggest that Your Majesty is partial or unjust, I beg you to forgive me. I am ruined and that seems to be all that I can think of at the moment."

The Shah said: "This man is confused. He is saying the same thing over and over again. He does not say that he thinks that we have been partial, but the rest of his statement can lead to no other conclusion. Well, Fazl Beig, how does it strike you? What do you say to this insistence of Mathias that justice has failed in this case?"

"Sire", said Fazl, "so far as it lay in the power of your humble servant, only justice has been done. Man could do no more. Mathias placed in the bag his original papers and Your Majesty put your seal on the bag. I left the bag with these people and told them to bring it on the next Thursday when I would look through the accounts and give the decision. I opened the bag in their presence. Mathias himself says that the seal was intact. No better decision could be given by a human judge".

No sooner had Fazl Beig finished his statement than Yusuf Khan burst in. "Sire," he

said, "I have never been unfair to any person. When we two left your presence, I told Mathias to carry the bag with him and bring it the next Thursday to the Judge. He said that I might keep it and that, as it was sealed, it did not matter who kept it. So, I carried the bag with me. Your Majesty received the papers and put the seal on a Saturday. From then to the next Thursday, I kept the bag safe in my house and saw that there was no possibility of any one interfering with it. How could any papers in it change, Your Majesty? The seal was intact. The bag could not be opened. What other way was there of getting at the papers? Of course, a clever man might suggest that the bag was slit open and the papers substituted and the bag again remade, but, Your Majesty, it is nothing more than a clever suggestion. If a bag is dealt with in this way, surely it can be made out. That bag, as Your Majesty saw, is made of a rare kind of thick carpet such as is made specially for the Palace. Let Mathias tell us how the contents could have been changed. Can he say that I got the bag cut to replace the papers and got it re-woven again?"

"Well, Mathias," the Shah asked, "what do you say to this?"

Mathias replied: "Sire, who suggests that the bag could have been cut and repaired? My misfortune has, no doubt, unhinged my mind but not enough to make me suggest such nonsense. How it was done is no matter. Your Majesty, it has occurred and the thing is over. Give me some petty service for earning my bread*and I shall forget this. It is my destiny".

Shah Abbas seemed very angry. "Well, Mathias," he said, "to ask for a small job for earning your bread, should you have made all this fuss? If you came and told me you had become destitute, I could have helped you as easily. Should you have made an appeal against the judgment of so just a Cadi as Fazl Beig, cast suspicion upon Yusuf Khan's conduct, even made it possible for people to think that we ourselves had tampered with the seal first put and had helped Yusuf Khan to alter the papers, and gone through all this mischievous farce? Go and ask the Vazir and he will give you a place somewhere. No man need starve in my territory. Yusuf Khan, I see that you are an honest fellow. You yourself told me the fact that the bag was with you from that Saturday to the next Thursday. You spoke out straight and clear. I need upright men like you near me. I make you from

to-day the Steward of my drawing room. Let all the people know this. Whoever is without means in my territories may come and ask me. I hold it as my business to find him employment and give him food. It is unnecessary for any one to take the roundabout course that Mathias has chosen for receiving help from me. Upright men will receive from me honour and promotion as Yusuf Khan has done". With this, the Court was dismissed.

The people went to their homes talking variously. Some questioned whether Mathias could have made so much fuss merely to get a job from the King. Yusuf never boggled about injustice. Since he incurred heavy loss in his own business last time, he had given up all thought of right and wrong. Others said that, when all was said and done, the Shah was bound to show some favour to a man of his own religion. Who could know the depth of man's heart and who knows what might or might not have been done to enable Yusuf to change the papers? Mathias himself was dejected beyond words. The Shah had never been unjust and had never done harm to the innocent. Such a King had taken so severe a view of him. This was his misfortune. Fazl Beig was proud that his decision

had been vindicated by the King's order. Yusuf Khan was of course elated that the judgment in his favour had been confirmed. And so the affair closed for the day.

In the consultation that took place later, the Vazir submitted to the Shah that he had been over-severe with Mathias. He was heart-broken. And "Yusuf Khan", he added, "should not have been given the stewardship of Your Majesty's Drawing Room. The people will say that you did all this on account of partiality for a man of your community." The Shah said: "I have never swerved from justice so far. This my people know. If, in a particular matter, one man like Mathias and a few men who are his partisans impute partiality to me, what is it I can do? It is God's law that the bad should suffer and the good prosper. While it is my part on this earth to execute the Divine Will, I shall keep only this in mind and nothing else. What this man will think, and what another will not, do not affect my judgment and my decision."

Some time passed. The people did impute partiality to the Shah and he heard of their doing it; but he did not seem to care. The new steward of the Drawing Room grew high in the King's favour. After some months of this service,

Yusuf Khan one day overheard the Shah saying to the Vazir: "Yusuf Khan is a very competent fellow. From the day that he became steward, these sitting rooms are kept in excellent condition. He knows exactly what I like and is changing the carpets and the screens from time to time and keeping everything spick and span. You know that Shiraz carpet with the design of the peacock: formerly, whenever it was taken out, I used to feel anxious lest it should be ruined by some carelessness of the servants. Now I have no such fear."

The Vazir answered: "Since, four years ago, Your Majesty had a steward whipped for allowing it to be dirtied, it is not merely you that is afraid when it is taken out: a few other persons are also in fear."

"So you remember that occasion," said the Shah. "That was for other reasons but if the carpet should be ruined, how is it to be replaced?" And then, he talked of other things. That day the Vazir told Yusuf Khan before leaving that the Shah had spoken in high terms of him.

Yusuf Khan suspected all these people. Some of the men in the Shah's personal service envied him as an interloper who had prospered a little too fast. The Vazir did not know Yusuf well; so,

he treated him neither too familiarly nor too distantly. Yusuf was aware of the envy of the other people and feared the coldness of the Vazir. Even when any one spoke kindly words to him, he feared that there was some evil meaning behind. When the Vazir told him of the King's good opinion of him this day, Yusuf Khan said: "Yes, sir, I am very grateful."

"You should never be too sure," added the Vazir, "of the favour of those in high places. Be careful and see that everything is done to give satisfaction. Any little thing in the drawing room being damaged upsets His Majesty very greatly. So you should be all eyes."

Yusuf said, "I understand, sir," and did obeisance. The Vazir moved on. Yusuf Khan wondered what harm this deep man might have in his mind against him. From the grave look on the Vazir's face Yusuf Khan inferred that he too wished him to come to trouble.

Some more time passed. It was a Friday and there was some special business and it happened that the particular Shiraz carpet to which the Shah had referred some time previously had been spread in the drawing room for the King to sit on. Yusuf had supervised the arrangements of the sitting room with special care. The

Shah came and sat upon the carpet and transacted some little business with the inner council. The Vazir and the councillors left thereafter. The Shah sat back in his seat, smoking in a posture of repose. Some minutes later, he called up Yusuf Khan and said: "I wanted to tell the Vazir to appoint you a Musaheb. Take this ring and show it to him and tell him I wanted orders to this effect to be brought up tomorrow." Yusuf Khan followed the Vazir, but did not get at him quickly. To find him and communicate the orders of the Shah took him some time. He returned to his duty then and, finding that the Shah had left, he called to the servants of the sitting chambers and told them to clean up the place. He was very happy that day. How highly did the Shah love him! What great luck was it that brought him to the notice of the King in that dispute with Mathias? Yet Yusuf Khan felt anxious too. In all the Palace, there was only one man who was his friend and that was the King. Everyone else envied his prosperity. That Vazir, for example, to whom he could in no sense be a rival; how he frowned when the King's orders about promoting Yusuf Khan were communicated to him! When the servants had finished their work, Yusuf Khan went over the whole place again

and, as usual, himself took out the Shiraz carpet to restore it to its box. As he lifted it up, however, he noticed a dark patch at one end of the carpet. He went nearer and found that a little bit of the carpet was burnt. The Shah was smoking when he gave the ring to Yusuf Khan and told him to communicate an order to the Vazir. Just that moment, he had placed the mouthpiece of the *hookah* on the carpet. Yusuf Khan had gone up carefully and removed the mouthpiece from the carpet and placed it beyond; but what was this now? Some fire from the *hookah* should have dropped on the carpet and burnt out quite a bit of it. This patch was somewhere on the tail portion of the design of the peacock in that corner. The four peacocks were marvels of workmanship and now one of the four was ruined. Whose was this villainy? Yusuf Khan trembled for fear and anger.

Who could it be that had done this and what should he do now to prevent further harm? Yusuf Khan looked round and through the doorways to see who might be near. The place seemed deserted. He made up his mind that there was some conspiracy to ruin him and that, in the interval between the Shah leaving the room and his own return after communicating the Shah's

instructions to the Vazir, some person had intentionally put a live coal from the *hookah* on the carpet. He then folded up the carpet, called to a servant and had it carried to the store. Thinking over the mishap, Yusuf Khan came to the conclusion that, in all probability, this was the work of the Vazir. There was no doubt that the Vazir was very envious of him. Some time ago, he had told him to be very careful about the favourite articles of the Shah and this carpet was one of them. The Shah should have left the *hookah* and gone and then some person who had been instigated by the Vazir should have dropped a live coal on the carpet. The thing for him to do now was to get the carpet repaired without the fact of damage coming to the notice of the Shah.

A week later, that carpet had to be spread again in the King's sitting room and there was again a meeting of the inner council. The carpet was spread and there was no sign upon it of the damage that had occurred on the last occasion. The peacock in this corner had his full equipment of tail feathers spread out as proudly as his fellows of the other three corners. No one could have said that this corner had been damaged and repaired.

The Shah came and sat on the carpet. The members of the inner council arrived and affairs of state were discussed. When more common talk began, Yusuf Khan who had been appointed Musaheb in proper form laughed respectfully at the jokes and later on took an obsequious share in the talk. After some time, the councillors left.

The Shah then said to Yusuf: "Which is this carpet, Yusuf Khan? Is this my special carpet? It looks so!"

"Yes, your Majesty," said Yusuf Khan.

"What is this then? It seems to be quite all right. That day when you went after the Vazir, I was careless in handling the *hookah* and a live coal should have dropped on the carpet. Some time later, I noticed it and removed it. I wished to ask the servants to tell you, but the men were at some distance and I did not. Did you get it repaired?"

Yusuf Khan felt sudden terror within, but then he reassured himself. The Shah was speaking in a bland and friendly tone and was not likely to have plotted against him. Recovering courage, he said: "Yes, Your Majesty, I got it repaired. I wished to do it without saying anything to Your Majesty in the first instance. I knew it would

delight you to see it repaired so as to be exactly as before."

"I am delighted, Yusuf Khan", said the Shah, "I am greatly delighted. I do not know how to reward you for the excellent workmanship. And now, tell me, was the bag got repaired in the same place or is there another man who can do the work so well? I thought you said that there was no one who could have cut the carpet of the bag and repaired it in this way."

Yusuf Khan fell prostrate at his King's feet. "I crave your forgiveness, Your Majesty. I throw myself on your mercy."

The next day, the King held his court again. The whole city and the country-side heard that the dispute between Mathias and Yusuf Khan would be reviewed and gathered in large numbers. With Mathias on one side and Yusuf Khan on the other, and Cadi Fazl Beig on one of the seats of honour, the King said in the hearing of the whole assembly: "Mathias, your contention in the case was right. The papers you had put into the bag were tampered with and so the papers that Cadi Fazl Beig saw were different. When the bag was with him, Yusuf Khan had it cut and changed the papers and repaired the carpet. That is how the Cadi gave a judgment that was incorrect

in the circumstances of the case. Yusuf Khan confessed to us. What do you say, Yusuf Khan?"

Yusuf bent his head in shame and said in a low voice: "That is so, Your Majesty."

"Mathias", said the Shah, "this man has done you grave harm. I shall give him whatever punishment you would like to be given. Tell me what punishment we shall give. You can have him trampled on by an elephant, or executed or banished from our territories."

Mathias said: "Your Majesty, it is against the tenets of our faith to wish to punish the man who offends us. He sinned that day. He is repenting today. By your kindness, I have been happy all this time. If it pleases Your Majesty, the money that is due to me may be ordered to be given to me. I have some skill in trade and shall use it for increasing the wealth of our country, as I did before. I don't wish to injure Yusuf Khan. In fact, if he is prepared to work with me again, I am willing to have him as partner. He has now learnt that fraud brings no profit and will not cheat again. So please Your Majesty."

"There is no question whatever", said the Shah, "about the money that is due to you being

given to you, but I cannot leave this man to go unpunished. The Vazir will place this criminal upon a donkey and send him in procession through the streets of the city, publishing, by beat of drum, that this man cheated his partner and tampered with justice and is thus disgraced by my orders. Let the people know how I reward wickedness. When the procession is over, let this man be left at the door of Mathias' house. He is a slave of Mathias from now. Yusuf Khan, treat yourself as a slave of your whilom partner and beware of trickery and fraud hereafter."

The court then closed. Yusuf was taken round in procession as ordered by the Shah and then left at the door of Mathias. Mathias treated him with courtesy and employed him as his Manager.

After giving orders in the Court Hall, the Shah moved into his chambers with the Vazir and the Cadi. These men were astonished at the decision of the King. Every one wanted to know how the fact of Yusuf Khan having tampered with the bag was discovered by the Shah. "How did Your Majesty get the confession from Yusuf Khan?" asked the Vazir.

"When Mathias insisted that the contents had been altered, though he could not think of

any way in which this could have been done, it struck me that he was speaking the truth. He did not give up insisting even when I told him that he would lead men to the conclusion that I had allowed the bag to be reopened and resealed. Mathias could have put into the bag only accounts which showed that something was due to him. It could not be that he had made any mistake about this. Yet, the Cadi found that, according to his own papers, Mathias owed money to Yusuf Khan. How could this happen if the papers had not been changed? Then, how did they change? I knew that the seal had not left my possession between that Saturday and the next Thursday. I knew too that our Cadi had made no mistake about the contents of the papers. The papers he saw, therefore, should have come there through something done by Yusuf Khan. Why did we think that Yusuf Khan could not have tampered with the papers? The seal was intact and the bag could not be slit open and repaired? The first part was correct; but why should it not be that the bag was slit open and then repaired? It could not have been easy; but, if it was the only course and the facts led to that conclusion, it stood to reason that that course had been tried

and had succeeded. This seemed to me all the more possible as Yusuf Khan of his own accord said that it was true that the bag was with him but it could not be cut and repaired. The man had thought about this course. On the contrary, Mathias thought this impossible: he believed it so impossible that the other view seemed to him insane. As the two parties were speaking, I realised that the only way to get at the truth was to put Yusuf Khan off his guard and see what resources he had in repairing stuff of the same kind as that of which the bag was made. So, I pretended to be greatly displeased with Mathias and to accept Yusuf Khan's story and, under the guise of rewarding his honesty, put him into a position where he would have to deal with carpets and rugs and similar articles of value near me. I burnt the end of the carpet which he knew I prized greatly, without his knowing that I had done it. He got it repaired so that there was no trace of the damage by burning. You all know what followed."

The Vazir asked: "Then Your Majesty did not suspect Yusuf Khan until he himself spoke of the impossibility of making a slit in the bag and repairing it?"

"No. But as he was saying it, I received the conviction that he should have done the thing

which he was describing as impossible and I made up my mind that I would make him repeat the performance and so appointed him steward of the Drawing Room."

"So," said the Vazir, "when I remonstrated with Your Majesty on giving Yusuf Khan a place of such signal importance, Your Majesty had seen in your mind's eye all that occurred later."

"Quite so," said the Shah, "and now I should prefer not to be asked further questions. Fazl Beig said of his decision that man could do no more. I am glad that man could do something more."

The Cadi lowered his head in shame the first moment; but the next moment, with an ease that is natural to the personal servants of a King, said: "Even now, I say that man could not do more than I did," and turned what previously was a word of conceit into one of flattery.

The flattery did not displease the King. He smiled as if the reply was what he had expected and almost desired.

AN OLD STORY

It was near evening on a day in *Ashadha*, close to the full moon. The sun had moved in and out of the clouds the whole day like a boy playing bo-peep and, as if tired of play, was going down to rest. The clouds, chased by the wind, had over-spread the sky as if they had run in every direction in an attempt to escape the pursuer and had failed. The wind itself was like a boy who had rushed a flock of sheep in wantonness and was tired of the exertion and had become quieter. It had now no energy for rough play like that of the earlier part of the day and had become peaceful, and, moving quietly amidst the large trees standing on the bank of the river, was wafting something of its own quietness wherever it went. The sun seemed to remember as the close of the day approached that he had a duty as witness of all that occurs in the world and to do it pushed his rays to all the corners of the earth and in the process invested all creation with the beauty of his light. Both wind and sun were now dignified and, engaged in their task, were at peace. The grove of trees beside the river was full of a murmuring sound as it is said the world is with the music of the spheres. The water of the stream which when small had played with all

the stones, big and small, which came in its way, with so much sprightliness and without distinction, had now grown and acquired great gravity. Even when smaller it was moving to its destination but was not thinking only of it. It had then some mind for play. Now it seemed to be set entirely on reaching the sea. Though in this manner it showed the grave ways becoming a grown-up young lady it could not quite forget its impulse to play. Once at long intervals it would whirl a little, and after another long interval dance a little; and all the time it made a beautiful sound, much as a young woman might hum a tune while engaged in her duties. The rays of the sun played on the stream and on the grove beside the stream, on the village in the distance and on its population, on the herd of well-fed cattle which were coming to the village and the young calves which were calling to their mothers. They seemed to have fallen in love with these things of earth and to admire the very beauty with which their touch invested them; and quivered as if in doubt whether to leave and as if unwilling. A great peace seemed to overspread creation.

Seated on a mat of the *kusa* grass on the platform in front of his hermitage on the bank of the stream, and looking on all the beauty of the

evening and filling himself with the peace which it shed was an ascetic. He was not advanced in years. He might have been somewhere about forty years old. His face was radiant; and was smeared with the ashes of renunciation. The radiance and the ashes made the face very like the fire covered over with the ashes in the little fire-container which was placed at some distance. He had on the usual ochre-coloured cloth. The wind and the sun at the close of the day were not more grave or dignified than this middle-aged ascetic looking out on the evening. These two had their play earlier in the day, and were grave only now. This man had had no play whatever. Born in a learned and orthodox family he had been picked up by the previous head of the hermitage even as a boy and brought away. From then he had grown up in a serious atmosphere. His impulses had been of the best and his teacher had trained him to be his successor, initiating him into the practices of self-control and realisation which had been handed down in the institution for generations. On his teacher's demise, this man had become the head of the institution. That teacher had been a very great man. His disciple held him in such reverence, that his one idea was to be worthy of the teacher and bring

no scathe to the reputation of his institution. Continual endeavour in this ambition had brought great success in the spiritual life of the ascetic, and the satisfaction and peace that come of it. Today the ascetic was enjoying this fruit of his well-disciplined and blameless life, and placing his peaceful self in communion with the peaceful evening, and deriving from it the indescribable joy of harmony which no heart can know which is not so pure.

A disciple came out of the *mutt* and said: "Sir, I have corrected all the copies."

The ascetic said, "That is good, thank you."

This brought the ascetic's mind from dwelling on the peace of the evening and enjoying communion with it to a thought that had troubled him earlier that day. It was not usual for the ascetic to have to examine the correctness of anything which he did in daily life. All that he did was so definitely prescribed that he in a sense did nothing himself. He was the instrument of a practice which had been handed down for centuries. But today something unusual had occurred. The ascetic had as usual performed the worship of the presiding Goddess of the *mutt*, and taken the usual light meal and given lessons

to a class of disciples. After this he had taken an advanced pupil in his lesson. This pupil's name was Sesha. He was the beloved disciple of the ascetic, as this man himself had been of his predecessor's. The ascetic had selected Sesha with great care to satisfy a standard which would have been approved by his dead master, with the intention that the boy should succeed him. That day, as usual, Sesha sat up with a book and began to read. He would read the text and then the commentary. If he felt any difficulty he might put a question. If the teacher felt that the subject required further elucidation, he would intervene. This was the procedure. When he had read some passages Sesha came upon the text: "No matter how aged, no matter how wise, no matter how great an ascetic, the pleasures of the senses attract a man." The pleasure here referred to is understood as that produced by the charm of woman. On hearing the text, the ascetic observed; "So we have come to this verse? I have often thought that the statement was not correct and that the real ascetic need not fear what is called the charm of women. Vyasa made this statement, and I am afraid, he was thinking of himself. I have seen an ascetic who need not have dreaded women's charm. Correct

the text and say, 'However old, however wise, the pleasures of the senses attract a man. The ascetic alone, they cannot attract'."

The disciple said: "Sir, as it is Vyasa's statement, shall I leave it alone?"

The teacher said: "Vyasa is great; but he talked of ascetics, not being one himself. If, for instance, Suka had said it, we should have hesitated. Correct the text."

The disciple had done so.

The ascetic then asked him to take out the other copies in the library of the *mutt*, and correct the passage in all of them accordingly, and closed the lesson there.

It was to this that the disciple referred when he said that he had made the correction in all the copies. The ascetic had come out of the *mutt* when the lesson was over and spent some time considering whether he was right in making the correction and come to the conclusion that he was. Being reminded of the occurrence now, he thought again and concluded again that he was right. He was saying it not entirely from his experience but, so far as he could tell, also from the experience of his teacher. He remembered the occasion when he had done this lesson in the

presence of his master years ago. As he read this text he felt a little ashamed and lowered his voice. He thought that his master might make some comment upon it and stopped reading. The master said nothing and, noticing the pause, asked him to read further. He had read on and when the lesson was over, asked his master why Vyasa had made such a statement. The master had said: "There is nothing wrong in the statement. We talk usually as if woman is inferior to man. There is no doubt that woman's soul is nearer perfection than man's. Whatever is inferior feels drawn to that which is superior. This is attraction, charm or whatever else it is called. As iron, however pure, is drawn to the magnet, so a man, however good, is attracted by the beauty of womanhood. It does not follow that to feel the attraction is to fall. One may feel the charm and control oneself. The verse is intended by way of caution." The master's explanation had satisfied the pupil's reason but not his heart. He was proud for his teacher. From the explanation given by the teacher himself, it was clear that he had not found women's charm dangerous. Apart from that explanation was his own knowledge of that teacher's life. It was clear as the sky on a cloudless day; unblemished as moonlight;

translucent as the waters of the stream in the last months of the year.

The teacher had left the body several years thereafter. The ascetic had taken his place and seen that verse on several occasions later. Each time he had felt as if he should correct the text but had desisted. On this occasion, he had been unable to let the verse pass without challenge. There was nothing for him to conceal. In his own life, he had on no occasion been attracted by the charm of woman. From his boyhood up he had seen many women. First of all his mother. How beautiful and serene had been that face! The ascetic had seen the same beauty and serenity in the image of the Goddess which he worshipped day after day. His mother was a beautiful woman. His sisters had been very beautiful girls; they had grown up to be beautiful women. All four of them had become householders and borne children and had died. He had seen their beauty. When he was still young and visited a large town, some enthusiastic disciples had arranged for a number of dancing girls going in front of the procession. The dancing women had looked at the ascetic as at any other man and made a display of their graces. The ascetic was impervious to their charm such

as it was. Years later, on a similar occasion, the ascetic had directed that dancing women should not be included in the procession in front of him. Often he would walk along the bank of his river and here and there see the women from the villages bathing in the stream. They were handsome as had been his mother and sisters. If they noticed the ascetic they would cover themselves and sit, or go further into the water and bend their heads shyly. The ascetic would be aware of them and turn his face the other way and walk on heart-whole. Now and then he would say to himself that the boy Krishna should have taken up the *sarees* of the women who were bathing because they had shown unnecessary self-consciousness in this manner.

We have to understand from this not that the ascetic was impervious to beauty of form, but that, seeing beauty, he yet did not desire to possess it. He was aware of beauty but was fancy-free. He rejoiced when he saw a beautiful form. But that joy was of the same kind when the form was that of a girl or young woman or that of a handsome boy or youth. Seeing such beauty the ascetic would say to himself, "God has increased the beauty in this world from age to

age. It is His device to ensure the continuance of creation." When he saw a well-grown young cow, with full body, large eyes, small upright ears trembling sensitively, and small pretty horns budding out of the head, he felt as happy as when he saw a beautiful young woman.

Often in the houses of well-to-do disciples he had seen crowds of beautiful women gathered to receive his blessings. Such occasions would be festive and the women would be wearing beautiful clothes and have their most costly ornaments on. They would be aware when approaching the Swami for blessings that the crowd around was looking at them, and keep their heads a little down in self-conscious shyness which multiplied their beauty four-fold. As they approached him, their eyes shed a light that glowed more and was brighter than the light of the jewels they wore. And so they would bend to his feet. Those feet were not over beautiful. Naturally they were of a brown colour, and discipline had made them thin. When he saw the handsome faces of the women so close to his feet the ascetic would think of the pool to the side of his hermitage in which the lotus on its stock played in the wind close to the dry sticks which the current had carried near them.

These many types of beauty, so gracious, so attractive, had yet never drawn his mind astray. Daily he would sit in the presence of his deity, the Mother of the universe, and looking on the image would say to himself that the man who shaped those features should have visualized the grace which is at the heart of creation, almost physically. He would think deeply on the beauty of those features and sink his mind in them as today he had sunk it in the beauty of the evening as it gathered around him. Who that had dwelt in so pure a spirit on the exalting grace of that image could be misled by the grace of a form in the common world? That is why the ascetic felt hurt when he read the dictum of Vyasa. Why should he not take exception to such a dictum when he knew that he had been free of weak impulse? The ascetic, therefore, thought he was perfectly right to have effected the correction. It is possible that he was also a little vain. If a man is so good why should he not have a little vanity? Vyasa, said the ascetic, knew the joy of household life; he might feel drawn to it. How could he speak of men like himself or his master who had never known women? This thought amused the ascetic a little and, as the rays of the sun seemed

to pierce into him to see the truth, he met them with a bright smile as if challenging inspection.

In this self-examination the ascetic left out of consideration some rather important factors. If a thing gives us joy it really should be said to attract us. Attraction is not something different from the power to produce joy. What, within, is joy in seeing is, viewed from outside, attraction. When, besides, he walked on the bank of the river and passed heart-whole without looking at the women bathing, how much of the heart-wholeness was due to the desire that the women should think well of him? When he saw the gatherings of beautiful women in the homes of his disciples, did he really feel no inclination to look on them again or was he acting with self-control with the object of impressing the people around with his discipline? The ascetic did not go into this investigation. He was aware that beauty gave him joy. If his desire to seem good as well as be good had not come in the way, it is possible that without being tainted by desire he would yet have looked at beauty again and dwelt on it as he did on the features of the Goddess whom he worshipped. The ascetic, however, did not then realise that he could have desisted from looking again at beauty from self-respect rather than its failure to attract.

The evening grew. The birds gathered in the grove beside the stream, and sang each as it liked and, having thus contributed to a beautiful symphony, stopped singing and went to rest. The country around became enveloped in twilight as if night, mother of the world, wished to put her child to sleep and covered it over with the end of her *saree*. The lights of the village in the distance, lit one after another, twinkled between the trees. A cow which was rather late in returning to the village was crying to its calf. As the evening deepened and other sounds decreased the low murmur of the water in the stream flowing full on its bed began to be heard within the hermitage. A disciple was repeating prayers within. The ascetic continued to sit outside, thinking a little, hearing the prayer a little, and enjoying the peace of the evening a little. About then a drizzle of rain began.

Suddenly, somewhere close by, the ascetic heard the sound of a woman's anklets. It seemed as if someone was walking very fast towards the hermitage. The ascetic turned in the direction of the sound to see who could be coming. It was an unusual hour for anyone to come to the hermitage. Generally visitors would come early in the day. The way to the hermitage lay through a dense

wood and close to it was a hill infested with panthers. People were therefore afraid to walk on the path after dark. If anybody coming to the hermitage was delayed, he would prefer to go into the village. How was it that today somebody was coming to the hermitage itself? That too a woman? It must be some woman bound for the village who had missed her way. The sound of the anklets came nearer and nearer and in the end a young woman stood near the door and called, "Mother, who is there in this house?"

As night was deepening, the ascetic could not make out clearly the face of the person talking. He could see only a little of it in the light thrown by the hearth. The lady seemed to have walked in the rain some considerable distance and got wet. Her clothes clung round her. The ascetic asked, "Who are you, madam?"

"Sir, whose is this house? Is it yours?"

"This is God's house, my mother. Why do you ask? This is a hermitage."

"Are there women in the hermitage?"

"No, little mother; why? Who are you and what has brought you here?"

The woman walked nearer to the ascetic and noticing his ochre clothes said: "Are you the Swami of this *mutt*?"

"Yes, little mother, I am watchman here."

"My father, I am greatly afraid. When you said that there were no women here I was terribly upset, but on seeing you I have felt rather reassured. I have found you as my father, for you are an ascetic. No one could suspect my conduct if I have to stay here. But, father, I do not know what has happened to my husband. What shall I do now?" With which the woman began to cry.

The hermit's mind was agitated. He felt anxious for the woman's husband, and pitied her in her distress. "Madam, what do you mean by something happening to your husband? Did you come together? And where do you come from?"

As he was agitated in consequence of the woman's distress the ascetic felt also a little elated as if he thought that here was a good opportunity for showing that his mind was not attracted by woman's form. The *saree* which had got wet in the rain clung to the visitor's frame and he looked at her figure as he had never before looked at a live woman yet. The ascetic was wrong in looking at the woman so, but he did not know.

The woman said: "Sir, my father lives in Ranganathapur. My husband and I started for my father's village. We were going to Molleyur. On the way he stopped for a minute and told me to walk on. Early in the day, he was constantly laughing at me for walking so slow and suggesting all kinds of man's reasons for my slow pace. So when he stayed back for a moment I wanted to show him how fast I could walk and came along. After having come some distance I turned back to see how far behind he was but he was not to be seen. 'It does not matter if I am a poor walker', I said to myself, 'let him come up', and sat on the road. A long time passed and he did not appear. I went back and searched all over the place but found no trace of him. I cried out and there was no answer. I was alone and it was getting dark. I had been told that if I walked along on this road we should reach a village. So I walked straight on this road. I did not find the village but have come here. My father, please grant me the gift of auspicious wife-hood and find my husband; send some one; look for him; my life is trembling within me;" and she sobbed, losing control of herself.

Man's heart melts becoming woman's tears. The ascetic felt great pity surging within

him. He said: "Madam, we have not many people in the hermitage; whom shall we send at this hour? I do not think your husband has come to any harm. At the point where the path branches you should have taken the wrong track. He should have gone the other way. Nothing worse is likely to have occurred. Stay here now and we shall get up in the morning and enquire in the village; and you will find that your fears are unnecessary."

"Father," said the woman, "I have found you as my own father, but you say that there are no women in the hermitage. How shall I stay alone here all the night?"

"My little mother," said the ascetic, "you are a daughter to me. There is a room within; you can use it. I shall sleep near the door and guard you. If you should feel any fear in the night call me; do not entertain any anxiety."

"You yourself—but of course you are an ascetic. Well, sir, I do not see what else can be done. I shall do as you say. In the morning please send some one to look for my husband and save me my wife-hood."

With these words the woman knelt before the ascetic in reverence; her soft and cool fingers touched his feet.

It was usual for the ascetic to look at the beauty of the world and try to imagine the far greater beauty of God, of which this beauty is a shadow. Did he by any chance follow this process, and having seen part of the woman's form, did he try to imagine the rest of her? Or was his mind set on edge by the effort he had made in the afternoon in correcting Vyasa's verse, despising the beauty of feminine form? Whatever the fact was, the touch of the woman's cool and soft fingers on his feet sent a thrill through him. Was it pleasant or unpleasant? The fact is, woman's fingers had never touched his feet in this way after he had left his home as a boy.

As the woman got up after doing him reverence, the ascetic called to a disciple within to come with a light. He was astonished at the queer response that his body had given to this woman's touch. The disciple brought a light. Seeing the woman in the light so brought, the ascetic felt sensations to which he had been an utter stranger.

The woman seemed to be a piece of lightning in the dark space against which she was standing. Like a traveller who looks at a dark cloud of *Ashadha* and wonders at its colour and is startled while looking at it by a sudden streak

of light running upon its surface, he was taken aback by the sheer beauty of this woman's form. Her hair, parted in the middle, marked the top of her brow, going down to the two sides in two curves. Her eye-brows seemed pencilled and were yet clear in their blackness, curved, as it were, in response to the curves of the hair on the top. The eye-lashes seemed like two competitors in a race, starting from one point and running to another and trying in so running to make the most beautiful curve. The *saree* was a bright blue crossed by lines of gold and lay over her in folds following the rises and falls of her womanly form. She was not smiling and yet produced an impression of a great happy smile looking through her eyes, as if she said: "I can smile but shall not do it to any one but my husband; but see it overflowing in spite of me." She had two dimples on her cheeks. They were so graceful, fixing the ravishing beauty of the cheeks, that it looked as if two screws had been shaped out of beauty to fix the beauty of the cheeks for ever there. The beauty of her form was in harmony with this various beauty of her face and at various points on it were the ornaments she wore: the golden clasp on her left upper arm, the bangles at her wrists, the nose-

screw with its brilliants, and the white jasmine worn in her jet black hair as if to prove that black and white could co-operate and make a vision of beauty. The sight of all this struck the ascetic with wonder. It was most unusual beauty, designed to capture the mind of any man. Why, alas, did such beauty come before the ascetic on this fateful day?

It did come before him on this day and it struck him with wonder. In his wonder at such beauty he looked full at the woman for a half minute.

The woman smiled a little and bent her head and said, "Sir, what is the need for a light here?" and added: "If you will kindly send somebody with me, I shall go to the village."

The ascetic felt a little abashed. "I called for the light to take you within " he said. " Let us go in, mother."

"Please send some one with me ; it is much better that I should go to the village."

"Madam, where is the village and where are we? It is not the hour for a journey. I am here to see that no harm befalls you. No harm can befall you in the presence of our Goddess. Pray get in."

All went in. The visitor was given an old *saree* used for the image of the Goddess. The lady stood by when the ascetic performed the worship of the Goddess and shared the food that was served later. This over, the servant of the hermitage spread a mat in a room adjoining the inner court yard and placed on it one or two more old clothes which had been used for the Goddess, and told the woman that she might go in and sleep there. The ascetic told her that he would be sleeping just outside the door and that she need have no fear whatever. The woman smiled a little and said: "God is my refuge; I have no fear." The ascetic sat outside the door and meditated. A little while later the woman came out of the room and did reverence to him and went in again and lay down. A moment after, she got up again, looked out of the door at the ascetic with a peculiar look of suspicion on her face, and shut the door and bolted it inside.

She had neither the innocence of early years nor the sageness of later life. She was just a playful young woman; aware of her beauty yet largely unsophisticated. Her movements and suspicious ways induced an inclination towards playfulness in the mind of the ascetic. He had never before looked at feminine charm so pronounced.

It might have passed before him, but he had never scrutinized it. This day he had wished to see what there was in it and got entangled. The woman treated him as a possible companion. Other women had treated him as a senior and a revered person; this young woman seemed to think of him as not different from any worldly man of years and as her equal. "What a funny thing," the ascetic said to himself. "It would be funny to frighten her a little." Playfulness is infectious. Pass a broom-stick in front of a sleepy cat; it wakes up to play at catching mice. Sit before your child and pretend to cry and shut your eyes and say, "Mother beat me"; the child will give up its other play and try to pull your hand away from your eyes. Similarly, the mind of the ascetic which had engaged itself in other matters and never thought of woman as the object of any interest was wheedled into playfulness by the ostentatious suspicion and the intentionally provocative playfulness of this woman. "What is the matter with me?" thought the ascetic; "this is getting absurd;" and held himself together and proceeded to meditate.

In his daily meditation he used to have in his mind the figure of the Goddess presiding in his hermitage. Today with the placid countenance

of the Goddess another face moved into the mind. Whose was this face? It was the face of the visitor. When he felt inclined to be playful he had no difficulty in putting his inclination aside but before such an inclination could arise, the mind had got loose from its normal moorings. The ascetic asked himself why this face was moving into his mind in this way and attempted to deny to himself that the young woman's beauty had attracted him. What did this mean? Supposing he could have married her, would he have wished to do so? No. Or supposing he could have her as a mistress now, would he have desired it? Again, no. There was no room in his purified heart for desire of this kind. What then was the desire? To look at that face, to just have one look at it. As you are walking in the street you may notice a fine rose playing on its stock in somebody's garden. That skilful combination of red and white in its texture and the arrangement of the petals seem to you marvellous and you are fascinated and look. You do not propose to walk in and take the flower. Nor would you really desire to own it. You are content with taking a good long look at it. Some such perfectly pure impulse was what the ascetic was feeling. He just wished to take a good long look at the charm of the young woman's face, so that he might not

think of it again and might meditate undisturbed on the features of the Goddess. Along with the impulse to look at her again were the self-control which practice had developed and the feeling that the desire was not proper. Struggle between the two impulses for some time led him to feel that the desire should be somehow put aside. To make sure that he should do nothing he thought improper, he wished to have his disciple with him and therefore called out to Sesha.

Between the moment of calling and the moment of the disciple's arrival his outlook changed. The ascetic had feared that the desire to see the young woman might get the better of his self-control and wanted Sesha to be with him. Then came the thought: "Am I so weak? Will my mind, which has been pure so long, fail me today? If I cannot keep straight on my own account, can I do it because of Sesha? Shall I rely upon pride rather than goodness for walking aright?" So he decided that it was unnecessary for Sesha to stay near him. What other thought subconsciously influenced him, who can tell? "If Sesha comes and sleeps near, it will be impossible however strong the desire might become to satisfy it. After all what is there as

wrong in the desire? I mean the woman no harm. I mean no harm to my own virtue. I wish to look at that beautiful face and her graceful form. It would not be proper to look at her so in the morning when others would be present." Did the ascetic's mind have a vague feeling in this sense? Anyhow, as the disciple came in response to the call, the ascetic decided to tell him to go back and he sent him back accordingly, saying that there was nothing particular.

In asking himself whether he should rely on pride rather than righteousness for walking aright and rejecting the help of pride, the ascetic had taken an unwise step. Like a one-legged man who throws his crutches away he deprived himself of what helped him everyday. As the moments passed, the desire within became deeper. When you are sitting beside a clear pond the branch of a tree casts a shadow on a patch of the water. If you are looking at the shadow and a dark and ugly snake should come up from within and appear suddenly where the shadow is, you will be startled. So the light agitation of the earlier part of the evening caused by the sight of beauty in the ascetic's heart became at a later hour in the night a deep and almost ugly desire. The ascetic thought of the young woman's face

again and again. The incidents of early night seemed to pass in review before him : the coming on of night which seemed to cover the world as a mother covers with the end of her *saree* the child which she holds to her breast ; the lights twinkling from the village like the thousand parts into which the God of light had divided himself in order to brighten homes ; the sound of the young woman's anklets, which seemed like little waves on the great sea of the moment's peace ; the beauty which surprised him when the light was brought ; the shyness on the young woman's face which enhanced that beauty so many fold ; the hesitation in her voice at thought of being alone in the company of strange males ; the look in those eyes which betokened some fear but equally some interest and shyness and possibly some desire ; that unutterable grace which seemed to inform every single little motion and gesture of the visitor : all this formed a combination that seemed to infatuate the ascetic. The realisation that what was happening to him was wrong stunned him. He tried to bend his mind to meditation of his deity but failed. Like hunger or thirst, this desire to look at the young woman just once again seemed to be a physical need which the mind could not deny.

What extraordinary beauty was this of the young woman, do you ask? Woman's beauty is of two kinds. One of them is gracious and placid; it conquers the heart, but soothes it and keeps it in peace. This is the beauty of motherhood. The other storms the mind and takes it off its moorings. This is the beauty of the mistress. Any man's eye can note in any woman both these principles. Most men looking on most women dwell on the mother part of the beauty rather than the other part. They do this, more or less instinctively. But if a woman should come before ever so good a man, looking like the charm and the lure of the mistress, isolated and made incarnate who can help seeing it? If he should try to measure his strength with it the chances are he will be beaten. The ascetic's mind was thus beaten today.

The ascetic was vanquished. He stood up telling himself that he would wake up the woman and see her once. He went to the door and pushed the shutter; it was bolted within. He put his ears to the shutter and listened. He could hear the long and deep breath of the woman in deep sleep. How beautiful should that face be in the deep peace of sleep?—said the ascetic's mind. He pushed the door again. There was a

sound of a person moving and the question was heard from inside: "Who is it?"

The ascetic said: "It is I, mother".

"The Swami of the *mutt*?" said the voice.

"Yes".

"Well, father, has my husband come?"

"No, mother, I wished to see if you were sleeping peacefully".

"Thank you, sir".

"I hope your sleep was good".

"Sleep was more good to me than this waking, sir; in sleep I was dreaming that I was journeying with my husband".

"That is a good omen. I hope you have no fear now".

"No sir, none".

"Have you bolted this door?"

"Yes, sir; I am a lonely woman; I put the bolt just to feel safe".

"It could not be that you feel any suspicion about us?"

"Not at all, sir."

"Yet, you are keeping the door shut and bolted though I have been talking for so long".

"You are an ascetic, sir, and will not understand. I am a lonely woman and should not open the door to any man in the middle of the night."

"Surely an ascetic would not do you harm?"

"I do believe that you would not. Yet it would not be proper. My clothes are in disorder. I have been asleep and have got up only now."

"I should like you to be certain that I mean you no harm. Open the door."

"I need no assurance of your goodness; but it looks as if you wish to see me?"

"You are my guest. May I not wish to make sure you are happy?"

"Sir, by virtue of your blessing, I am well and happy. Please give up anxiety on my account. I should have refused to talk so long with anyone else in the middle of the night. I have spoken at all because it is you. Please go and rest."

"So you will not open the door?"

"No; I shall open it to my husband and to none else, however learned, however old, however ascetic."

The words surprised the ascetic. He collected himself and said: "You know the text?"

"They are my words."

"That is a jest. You are a curious young woman, cruel one moment and playful the next. Now, in a minute I shall show you that the man who made that statement did not know the truth. Open the door and I shall show you that a real ascetic can be guilty of no such folly".

"You may say what you like, sir ; I shall not open the door."

"Suppose I force it open?"

"Do, and learn a lesson."

The ascetic stood still for a moment and said "very well" and pushed the door open. It seemed not to be bolted and yielded to the pressure. The ascetic stepped in.

Standing before him was no woman but the effulgent figure of a reverend sage in matted locks, with a strange smile on the face. The ascetic was taken aback, and looked down in shame.

The sage said: "If the mind was not attracted why would you wish so much to see her?"

The ascetic fell on his feet. "I was foolish and beg to be pardoned", he said.

"You thought that I did not know. That did not matter for you did not know me. But

what about your own master? Should you not have accepted his view?"

"I have offended greatly."

"Bow to him then."

The ascetic raised his head and saw, standing beside Vyasa, his predecessor and teacher. The elder looked at his disciple with affection and what seemed slight amusement. The ascetic put his head at the teacher's feet.

Having done this he got up with the intention to speak to the sage and the teacher. They were not there. Where they were standing he saw, lying on the ground in her bed, the young woman of the evening. The ascetic felt no desire to look at her or to dwell on the beauty of her features. Standing where he was for a few moments, he realised that the experiences of the evening had come by the grace of his teacher to help him in realising himself. He then came out and shut the door behind him. Sitting in his place he thought of the deity of his daily worship and found he could now fix his mind on Her quite easily.

When day dawned and the sun came to watch the doings of the world again, the ascetic came out of his meditation. By that time the servants of the hermitage had all got up and were

attending to their duties. The husband of the visitor of the previous evening had come to the *mutt* and they had prepared to start.

When the ascetic was ready to receive them, the young woman approached him with her husband. They both prostrated to him and the woman said: "When I was helpless and distressed you took care of me and guarded my honour."

The ascetic said: "My mother, God looked after both you and me."

After a moment's interval he added: "I came into your room in the night and saw you peacefully asleep."

The young woman said: "I do not know how, sir; it must have been because I was feeling thoroughly safe under your care; I slept immediately I went to bed, and woke up only in the morning. I am not aware of your having come into my room. When I woke up I found the door unbolted and thought perhaps I had not bolted it in the night."

"No, mother. You had bolted it. I pushed it open."

The ascetic asked the husband and wife to stay for breakfast and they agreed. They were present when he worshipped the deity at the

hermitage and received the consecrated food. The ascetic did not notice in the young woman any of the playfulness and lure which had ensnared him the previous evening.

That afternoon, when the visitor had left and the ascetic sat with his disciple for the usual lesson, he asked the young man to restore the verse to its original form.

The disciple corrected the text and then asked, "Great sir, did Sharadamba order this?"

"Why do you ask?"

"When Sharadamba arrived last evening I made out, sir, that it was She. As you were not pleased to tell me, I thought that you wished to leave us under the impression that it was some woman visitor and conducted myself accordingly. When in the middle of the night you called me I thought that you must be going into Her presence and were gracious enough to think of having me with you at the hour of grace. When I came to you, however, you told me to get back again. No doubt because you must have seen that I was not fit for a final beatific vision. I returned as ordered but, thinking to be ready if you should call me again for anything, I sat in the front hall. When you stood outside the door

and exchanged some words with the Goddess, which I could not hear clearly, some kind of stupor came upon me. In spite of the stupor, however, I was aware that you went in and spoke to persons within the room. I woke up in the morning and knew that you had sent me away because I could not have stood the experience. Now when you asked me to correct the verse I thought that it must be because the Goddess had explained to you in the night how the original verse represented truth”.

“So you think that the lady who left us a little while ago is Sharadamba?”

“No, sir. The lady that came last evening was Sharadamba. This one was different.”

“What do you think happened to the lady that came in the night?”

“Sir, what do I know of all this? With your spiritual attainments you can manifest a hundred wonders. What shall I say of this one and that other of them? You were gracious and allowed me to be aware that the visitor was Sharadamba and I was aware. You are not pleased to let me know anything more. I cannot know anything more. Nor am I hurt, for I know that both in what you permit and what you disallow you have in mind what is good for me.”

AN OLD STORY

The ascetic was greatly touched by ~~his~~ disciple's love and faith in him. He admired the innocence to which divinity was visible where he, the elder, had only seen mortal charm. He said : "Sesha, my boy, your state is the more gracious. May God be good to you in the same way ever and always. You saw divinity where I saw mere woman." He then explained to his disciple without reservation all the occurrences of the previous evening and night and said : "Remember this yourself and tell this to all who come to this place for spiritual guidance. Do not think that you will harm my reputation by telling this story. I am not ashamed of what has occurred to me. I am only happy that God saved me from the abyss on whose brink I walked with pride last evening. He it is that keeps man on the straight path of righteous life. Man, by his effort merely, cannot walk on it. Pride and righteous living ill go together. Friend, the primal source of all beauty is God. He is daily luring us each according to our make ; here to physical form, there to spiritual eminence. Whether here or there it is His beauty that draws us and when He draws who can withstand ? I should even say that it is good that we should be drawn ; only, remember all the time that what draws is He. Nothing is beautiful or

good but from God. Give your heart to what is beautiful and good, but see in it the form assumed by divinity. And pray to the Highest always for the vision to see only Its manifestation in everything."

The ascetic stayed long in charge of the hermitage. He and Sesha grew great in realisation of the spirit, helping each other. The teacher spoke of the experience of that particular night to many a disciple who came to him. Men wondered at his non-love of self and the great unreserve which he practised for their good. To confess the error of yesterday readily today in the joy of having learnt to love truth through that error was the great lesson which the teacher inculcated in his followers. The seat which he adorned attained great eminence in his time and is today considered a centre for spiritual enlightenment. Many generations have derived sustenance by contact with the teachers of his line and all have remembered as the founder of the lineage the ascetic who fell because of a spiritual spell and was picked up to holiness by the mercy of God.

A STORY OF THE HOLI FEAST.

Every Holi feast brings to my memory the story of Savitramma of our village. This feast was celebrated with great *éclat* in our village in the days when I was a boy. I need not tell you what *éclat* in this festival is. (I do not want any one to misunderstand me. I do not mean by *éclat* the songs and acts of doubtful propriety which, I understand, make of this festival in the Malnad something for people to be ashamed of. We have not got that kind of song or play in our side of the country.) We made a huge bonfire and beat our mouths to our hearts' content. To make a huge bonfire, you have to make a huge stack of rubbish, and to do this, you go to every single house in the place and draw the attention of the household, in the usual way, by a lusty beating of the mouth. You know, of course, that this is supposed to be done round a corpse, and persons who would take this as a bad omen on any other day of the year listen to this horrible noise with delight on this particular day. They believe that if there is a mock beating of the mouth in front of the house on this occasion, there will be no need to beat the mouth in the house in reality in the coming year; that is, there will be no death. So it seems to them quite a

good bargain to tolerate one violent beating of the mouth on this day by way of composition for a whole year. So in our village we youngsters would go from house to house and beat our mouths with tremendous vigour to get out all the old baskets and sieves and mats and brooms and other things which were of no use or almost of no use to the household. Boys now feel shy to raise the voice and beat the mouth. They collect also much less rubbish than we used to do. Of course, you may, if you like, gather together quantities of dried cow-dung and fuel to make a bonfire but that means cost. What is more, the bonfire of the Holi feast is not to be made of things which can be really used in the house as fuel. Except for a little show and for mischief we never put into the bonfire stack anything that could be really used.

To the *éclat* that resulted from a huge stack of rubbish was added in the last few years when I took part in the festival in our village, a remarkable vow which our Savitramma then observed. The vow was this. The morning after the bonfire Savitramma would come and sit beside the ashes and we would throw some of the ashes upon her and go round her beating our mouths. Then we would distribute the food which had been conse-

crated by offering to the God of Love, pour red water over one another and go out to the tank to bathe. In the last year in which I happened to take part in the wildnesses of the Holi feast Savitramma's vow itself came to an end. The story that I wish to tell you is really the story of that vow of Savitramma.

There is in our part of the country a belief about the ashes of this Holi bonfire. You know, of course, that the fire is the fire in which the God of Love was burnt when Siva looked on him in anger. The spouse of the God of Love begged Siva to give her back her husband and Siva granted her prayer. Our people believe that if, on the morning after the bonfire, when the ashes of Love's destruction are cooled and Love is revived, a widow sits by the burnt heap and has the ashes thrown on her, and gets the participants in the feast to go round her and beat their mouths as round a dead body, she will get the same husband in the next life and live a full life of happiness with him and die before him—which is a thing all our women desire. Though this belief is generally prevalent, I had never seen any woman really undergoing the ordeal. The only person whom I knew submitting to it was our Savitramma.

She began the vow one particular year which I remember very well. I was then five years old. Then, year after year she observed this ceremony. The first year when she performed the vow, the boys, when asked to pour the ashes on her, poured quite a lot of it. It was just fun to them and they did not know what they were doing. Another thing they did not know was Savitramma's reason for going through the ceremony. By the second year they had known it and did not repeat the performance of the first year. Their leader put just one pinch of the ash upon her and all of them went round her and beat their mouths just once and then asked her to go. Savitramma was not satisfied. She preferred the larger quantities of ash and beating of the mouth which she had in the first year and did not like this severe economy. When she asked that more ashes should be poured on her and the beating of the mouth performed more fully, Shama, brother to our Bhima the lame, said to her: "What do you mean, madam, by asking for more beating of the mouth? It is not music, is it? And if it is for a vow, beating the mouth once is just as good as beating it a hundred times." Savitramma said: "Friend, if I asked you to speak kind words, you may ask why you should do it. Why should you

be stingy when asked to do me harm?" Shama said: "Whether for a harm or a good thing, you must have the qualification. If there was a corpse, for instance, we could beat our mouths before it as much as was required. How can we do to a live person the honour that is due only to the dead?" Savitramma replied: "Friend, what you call a corpse is a dead corpse. I am something better. I am a live corpse. You must show to a live corpse more honour than to a dead one." After all this discussion, the boys decided that to give her satisfaction they would throw upon her three separate handfuls of ash and go round her three separate times, beating their mouths. This was done that year. In the next year or two, the ceremony got crystallised in this way and every step in it established by custom. Savitramma tried to get the boys to do something more than this, but they stoutly refused. After all, each of us had a mother. Even as we were throwing the three handfuls of ash upon Savitramma some of us would be weeping. When this ceremony was over, Savitramma would go to the tank and bathe there and come back to the village. As no other person in the country around observed this vow, the festival in our village became famous.



2

In order that you might understand why Savitramma undertook this vow, I have to tell you her previous history. Savitramma was the only child of her parents. They had been very poor people and gave this daughter in marriage to a youth among their relatives in the same village. Savitramma's father-in-law was one Narasimha Sastry. Her husband's name was Sreenivasa Sastry or Seeni for short. No one called Seeni by his full name. In fact people would have been astonished to hear him addressed as Sreenivasa Sastry. Probably he himself would have been more astonished than any one else. Sreenivasa Sastry and Savitramma were very young when they were married. They had played together as children. From childhood Savitramma had called the boy Seeni. After marriage one's wife, at any rate in those days, was not supposed to call the husband by name, nor in fact was one supposed to call one's wife by name. We people have forgotten this law these days. In spite of the rigour with which the world then observed it, Savitramma, even after she became Seeni's wife, continued to call him 'Seeni' and he continued to call her 'Sati' as before. In elderly people this would have been considered unforgivable offence, but, as this husband and wife were young, people only laughed at it.

Seeni had four elder brothers. Narasimha Sastry, the father, was then a fairly aged man. Seeni had grown up within the village. He had not learnt much and had nothing particular to do and was inclined naturally to a little mischief. I do not mean by mischief anything very serious. When the pomegranate tree in anybody's house bore fruit, Seeni would manage to take some proportion of it with or without the owner's knowledge. In the season for mangoes, the first person to taste a mango was always Seeni. When he grew up, the first house in the village in which mangoes were pickled was old Narasimha Sastry's and the mangoes would have been brought by Seeni. It was the same with myrobalan and the berries and roots which are supposed to make pickle of the finest flavour. When Seeni started to bring these berries and roots, our village knew that the day had come for making pickles of them for the coming year. But others could go with him and he would collect enough both for himself and them. On days of processions and festivals in the temple, Seeni would be the most active person, ringing the bell and shouting to all and sundry. Not that any one asked him to do this or that bit of work. He would go and do whatever work was waiting to be done and in return,

at the end of the day, would take from the priest in the temple a share of the broken cocoanuts.

Having grown up without restraint and control Seeni was a well-built and powerful-looking person. Whatever quarrel occurred in the village, Seeni was sure to be there. Either he was participating in the quarrel or mediated between the parties. Once, when he went out to pacify people in a quarrel, one of the parties hit him with his bill-hook on the face. This left a permanent mark between his eyebrows. Thus he grew up, a kind of irresponsible young fellow. His household hoped that he would become steadier after marriage. But marriage made no difference to him.

Two years after Savitramma and Seeni were married, both her parents got some kind of fever and died. Savitramma was left alone and had to stay in her husband's house. All that her father had left her was the old house in which he had lived. Savitramma grew into womanhood in her father-in-law's house. The nuptials should have been celebrated some time thereafter; but this was not done. Even Narasimha Sastry was not very well-to-do and in such houses they wait until a daughter's marriage and a son's nuptials and a grandson's tonsure and another grandson's in-

vestiture have to be done, and do them all together and give one dinner. To do each separately would mean so many more dinners and so much more expense ; and poor people can ill afford it.

While matters stood thus, the Swami of Sivaganga came to Holenarsipur in the course of his peregrination. People from our village went to Holenarsipur to take his blessings. Narasimha Sastry and his household went one day. Seeni was of the party. He mingled with the personal servants of the Swami and waited upon him for three days. When, three days later, the Swami proceeded to the next place, Seeni said that he was following him. The parents asked him how far he would accompany the Swami. The young man told them that he would spend a week or so with the teacher and then return.

Savitramma loved her husband dearer than life. There was nothing in the world other than this husband which she could call hers. He alone was hers. All the others were related to her through him. She was ten years when she came to her father-in-law's house and that was five years ago. All her time she spent in looking at Seeni or thinking of him. When her husband announced that he was going with the Swami for

seven or eight days, she felt some unnamable fear within, but she could not say anything to him. Custom prevented her walking up to her husband and talking to him. So she suffered her fear and submitted to circumstance; and when he went with the Swami, she returned to the village with the rest of the household.

Seeni did not return. Eight days passed; one month passed; four months passed; there was no news. Yet, no one in the house felt very anxious. The parents would say to each other that the boy would have just wasted his time if he had been in the village, but now he was with the Swami, and that, after all, was a good thing. Savitramma heard these words. But they gave her no comfort. If she had been a man, she said to herself once or twice, she could have gone after Seeni and brought him. But she was not and this was not a thing she could do. The only thing she could do was to pray to the Goddess of all good. So, day after day, she sat before the image of the Goddess, worshipping and praying, hoping for her husband's return.

When a year passed and Seeni did not return, the household began to feel anxious. The eldest brother made enquiries and learnt that the Swami had finished his peregrinations and returned to his

headquarters. "In that case," said the parents, "Seeni is sure to come back shortly." But he did not come. The eldest brother said he would go to the Swami's headquarters and find out why. When he went there he found that Seeni was not there. Those who had accompanied the teacher knew Seeni. It seemed that he went with the Swami right up to Benares and stayed with him all the time he was there. When the Swami started on the return journey, Seeni and a companion of his started north saying that they would go to Badari and return. The whole camp objected and said: "What folly is this? It is not easy to do the pilgrimage to Badari." But Seeni did not listen. The eldest brother came home with this information.

The whole household gave up hope of Seeni returning. Savitramma fell into unutterable grief and began to count the days.

Four years passed and there was no sign of Seeni. By this time some misunderstandings had arisen in the household between the mother-in-law and other daughters-in-law. There was talk of a partition. The question then arose whether they could set apart a share for Seeni. After all, there was not very much property to share and therefore the fewer the sharers the

better. The brothers said: "How do we know what has happened to him? If he really went to Badari and wanted to return, would he have been absent so long? It is very doubtful if he is alive, seeing the place is so far off and the way so dangerous and so many diseases take toll of pilgrims in those strange places." Hearing the suggestion, Savitramma felt as if a fire was lit within her. Even as these discussions were proceeding her father-in-law died. When the ceremonies were over, the partition became inevitable. The brothers in the household effected a partition, deciding that Seeni must be dead; and convincing the elders who helped in the partition that this was reasonable, gave a share of the property to their mother and their sister-in-law for maintenance. Savitramma went with her mother-in-law to the house of her parents which still belonged to her. She was then some twenty-two years old.

Some time after this Seeni's eldest brother, who had gone on a journey somewhere, came back with news that Seeni's companion in the journey to Badari had returned and had said that Seeni died in Calcutta. Savitramma had learnt to fear that her husband might not be alive. That fear had now turned true. She then assumed

the marks of widowhood. Her mother-in-law and brother-in-law and the village people told her not to do this on the basis of a rumour. Savitramma said in reply: "When I did not know what happened to my husband I believed he was alive and used saffron and red powder. Not to have done so would have been inauspicious and might have caused harm to my husband where he was. I too dislike looking a widow, but what is to be done? When I have heard that he is dead, I have nothing for which to live. What shall I do with looking well? If he is dead and I do not observe the discipline of widowhood, his soul might lack peace in the other world." She prayed to God to grant her in the next life the opportunity for serving her husband which had been denied her in this one and began to observe all the vows and ceremonies which she believed or people prescribed as ensuring happy reunion in the coming life. Sitting near the ashes of the Holi bonfire and getting the ashes thrown upon her, and making the participants in the feast go round her beating their mouths as round a corpse, was one of these vows. The ceremony is so grotesque that it looks as if it had been prescribed by some person inclined to cruel jokes. Yet Savitramma undertook it, so unwilling was she to give up even the slightest

chance of a happier life in the future. Her mother-in-law told her to give up this one vow and do anything else she liked. Savitramma did not listen. "Why shall I think of myself?" she said; "I shall look queer and people will laugh at me? If this should frighten me off a vow, what is the strength of my devotion to my husband? Supposing he had lived and treated me badly and kicked me and abused me, would not people have laughed and would it not have been a disgrace? Yet, I should have submitted if I wanted to be called a good wife. How does it matter to me if they laugh at me now for something else?"

3

The year in which I participated in the Holi feast in our village for the last time was a year of unprecedented enthusiasm. It happened that that particular year some half a dozen of us were finishing our studies in our village and leaving for Mysore for further education. Several of these persons are now in high employment under Government and are known as very honourable and efficient men. I may say that when they were employed honorarily in the Holi feast in our village they conducted themselves with great efficiency. In that particular year their efficiency

in their honarary duty reached the climax of vociferousness. I may say that I also contributed my might. I hope no one will laugh at my saying that even in beating one's mouth there is such a thing as skill, and that, this skill develops with experience. There is, in fact a tradition in the business. Our leaders, by long practice, knew the exact manner of making this horrible noise tolerable. We watched how they did it and developed our skill in the art. Our juniors learnt it from us. When we, who had the proper amount of experience, stood before a house and beat our mouths, the noise though unpleasant became tolerable. At least we thought it did. Besides, the inspiration of the mourning without cause had touched our lame Bhima to compose verses for the feast. We had got the nonsense by heart and walked the roads repeating it. I have heard that verse in other villages since, which proves that it was fitted for the occasion. The joy we derived by repeating the doggerel, going along the streets of our village, was astonishing. I derive less pleasure from much finer poetry now. What little things make youth happy! And the enthusiasm of our young fellows mounted beyond its usual heights, in consequence of a particular incident, that year.

One of our people, Narayana Sastry, had pulled down a portion of his house with a view to rebuilding it and had got new timber. Every year he used to give us one log of wood. That year we beat our mouths for an extra five minutes before his house and told him that, as a fortunate man who had pulled down an old house, he might give us two lengths of bamboo extra. For some reason he said he would not give even the log of wood which was his usual contribution. This roused the spirit of our young heroes. Like a river which roars on meeting an obstruction, our boys simply swarmed round the old man. But, however much we argued, our Sastry would not yield. Seeing his obstinacy, Bhima the lame, our poet-laureate of the doggerel verse, slid out of the crowd, and, as we kept the Sastry engaged in front of the house, got into the backyard and walked away with a pillar and as much bamboo as he could carry. We had not intended to take anything by stealth in this way. But when stealth had been practised by our leader, how could we betray him? So we pretended not to be aware of the performance and kept the Sastry engaged until Bhima was safely away, and then said: "Very well, sir, please do not get upset by our importunity. You are a man building a

house. It is possible that a log of firewood can be used as a pillar or a rafter. You are welcome to use it so, so far as we are concerned." The Sastry was perhaps a little surprised at our soft speaking. He did not understand it until, much later, he noticed when he went to the backyard that some bamboo and a pillar had been carried away. He knew, of course, that it was our work. So he rushed to the bonfire field shouting like ten demons.

Two of our boys were there as watch and gave us a shout ; and we all ran up, one man with an old basket, another with an old sieve, others with old brooms, still others with some dried cow-dung. We had a great fight with the Sastry. He said that if we really burnt his bamboo and pillar he would break our necks for us. Bhima, the lame, became a poet again. "You will not break our necks," he said, "you will surely shake your ears." Tirumal said: "Do not shake your ears: shake your snuff-box and give us a pinch." And he pretended to be taking a pinch of snuff and produced with his nose the noise with which Narayana Sastry was known to introduce that stimulant into his nasal passage. This did not improve matters and it looked as if, in defending the bamboo and pillar which we had brought away

from the Sastry, we should be prevented from making any further addition to our stack. Again Bhima, the lame, used strategy. "Stand, here, boys," he said, "and look after the Sastry ; I shall go to his house and bring away whatever other bamboo or wood I can lay hold on." With this he walked towards the village. The Sastry realised the danger. It seemed to him much better to give up the bamboo and the pillar that had been already lost than to save it and lose much else instead. So he ran after Bhima, calling him all kinds of names.

Bhima himself had not intended to bring any more bamboo or wood from the Sastry's house. He merely wanted to make the Sastry keep watch at home and he succeeded. We all admired our Bhima's ideas in such matters. It was strategy like this that made Sivaji and Prithviraj and Caesar and other famous generals such great victors in war. Bhima's luck was bad. He was born into these unheroic times and his strategy was of use merely to get some fuel for the Holi bonfire.

Just as the Sastry caused trouble about the bamboo, so Bori, the sweeper-woman, made trouble about the old brooms which we brought away. So did some others about other similarly worthless

stuff. Things that we thought were fit only for burning, these people would not give up without a fight. If they wanted a fight, we could not say no, and so we fought our way to all the rubbish that could fill our stack and made it so high as it never was before.

I shall not describe our setting fire to the stack and the wonderful success that the bonfire was. My joy in the Holi bonfire when I was young was a matter of instinct. Even today it is very much the same and only a very little rationalised. When this is the case one has not the words which can describe the joy. Our bonfire used to be lit on a field outside the village. The lane to our village lay on the margin of the field. There are four or five peepul trees close to the spot. Some distance from these is a temple of Hanuman. In the distance you see the tank-bund and at the end of it the high road. Our field was thus most beautifully situated for a bonfire. When the huge stack took fire and lit the peepul tree and the temple and the nearby houses and the trees on the nearer margin of the tank, this enclosure of firelight within the outer enclosure of moonlight made an impression on the mind that gave delight but defied analysis. Were we in the same old village or was it a reflection of it in another

world? Something of the joy must be owing to the feeling that the rubbish of a dying year is being burnt up as a prelude to the celebration of the first day of a New Year. The burning of this rubbish is also symbolical to a grown-up mind of the destruction of whatever is worthless in our life. From the next day the village would use new baskets, new sieves, new brooms ; or, if any household used the old one, it would be because it was unwilling to part with its rubbish and held on to it. Poets have been unable to describe the beauty of the night of the full moon in this month of *Phalgunā*. Fortunately, to know its beauty you need not go to a poet's description of it. Whoever wills may give his heart to it the next time that night comes and enjoy it to the full. To the simple people of our village, the joy of this bonfire lit in that night of full moon was a very real joy. The usual crowd gathered round the fire that night. Even Narayana Sastry came to enjoy the sight. "If my bamboo and wood are making a bonfire, and other people can see it and enjoy it, why should I lose the opportunity?" he said. If he could have had the bamboo and the pillar back, he would have been glad, but as he could not have them, he thought that, at least, he might take a share of the joy they

produced by burning. The huge stack took quite a long time to burn and it was well past midnight when we went to our homes.

In the morning was the cooling of the ashes and Savitramma's performance of her vow. We all gathered near the ashes very early. Our Kittu went out to invite Savitramma. She had finished her bath earlier and was ready, and came along immediately, and took her usual place near the ashes. It must have been the ninth or tenth year of her observing the vow. As Savitramma came near the ashes, some people were passing up and down the lane and some were standing idly to see the ceremony. Three of us, as usual, took a handful of the ashes and approached Savitramma and went round her once. We should have put the ashes upon her the next moment, but she seemed astonished about something and turned towards the group of people standing near the lane. Swift as lightning she got up the next moment, looked hard at the crowd, shouted "Seeni," and dropped down.

All this took place far quicker than my description of it now. We were taken aback and kept the ashes in our hands. Someone from the crowd came with long steps, yet fairly deliberately, to where we were. He stood near

Savitramma, and, after looking at her for a moment, said "Poor thing, poor thing"; and then told us to bring some water, and sat down. Our boys obeyed instinctively and without question. I was too astonished even to move, and was looking at the stranger with great interest and was aware of just one single fact about him. And that was a mark of an old wound on his forehead.

The stranger was indeed Seenī. It would appear that as we took the ashes and went round Savitramma, he approached the village by the lane and noticed the crowd and joined it. Seeing a woman sitting and us boys going round, he asked the crowd what it was. Someone told him that it was a woman whose husband had died in some distant land, observing a vow because of him. "Who is the lady?" the stranger asked.

"The daughter-in-law of Narasimha Sastry."

"What is her name?"

"Savitramma."

"Savitramma!" said the stranger and looked at her sitting near the ashes. It was at this point that Savitramma suddenly stood up and cried out and fell in a swoon.

Sreenivasa Sastry took Savitramma's head on his lap and sprinkled cold water on her face to

revive her. We realised from his ways that he should be Savitramma's husband and, having at first felt a regret that the ceremony had been interrupted, realised with delight immediately that it had concluded better than in any previous year and that the God of love had come to life again, not in a story, but in real life.

It is a convention which mankind cherishes that a husband feels a unique kind of love for his wife. I suppose that to some extent it is also true. But I must say that neither before that day nor later has it ever been my fortune to see a husband show to his wife in look and word and exclamation such a mixture of consideration, pity and love and tenderness as Sreenivasa Sastry to Savitramma that day.

The circumstances also were unique.

4

One or two people in the village raised the question whether the stranger was really Seeni. When the mother and wife had agreed, why, you will ask, should there have been a question? But then there was a question of redistributing the family property which had been previously partitioned. Sreenivasa Sastry told the people that raised these doubts stories about them and their parents and their grand-parents which they

did not desire to have him tell more than once. These people then shut up. The property was repartitioned and Seeni got his share. Since then he has been a respected householder in our village. When I went to my village this time, I heard from him the story of the years of his absence. The man who had travelled with him and said that he died in Calcutta had really left Sreenivasa Sastry in the isolation sheds of the Calcutta Municipality, stricken with plague and almost on the point of death. Savitramma's fortune was good and her husband had recovered. After that he had met people who talked of Yoga and the powers it gives and, wishing to learn things, had spent years travelling with them and serving them. The years he spent in this way were years of great adventure. Sreenivasa Sastry's narrative was of engrossing interest but too long to be repeated here. The man who had abandoned him in Calcutta acknowledged on Sastry's return that, when he left Calcutta, Sastry was alive though very ill.

Sreenivasa Sastry has now two sons and Savitramma is a happy wife and mother in a home of her own. I spoke to Savitramma also this time. She was nothing very attractive when I knew her in the past. Widow's weeds among

us are not designed to improve a woman's looks. Now, as wife and mother, Savitramma looks like a goddess treading on our earth. What she had hoped to win for a coming life by observing a vow whose ugliness scares people, she had realised in this same life. Our people are greatly sensitive to occurrences of this kind. "A great woman this," they say: "Ordinary people observe a vow with ordinary devotion and it bears fruit in the next life. To conviction and strength of mind like Savitramma's, the fruit comes in the same life." Savitramma, like the heroine of ancient legend from whom she gets her name, seems to them a woman who brought her husband back to life and they show her extra regard on occasions of feast and festival. Girls of the present generation in our village, making gifts to elders to secure happy home life, give them first to Savitramma. Their mothers say: "Savitramma, your will is a great will and your blessings bear sure fruit. Pray, bless our girl."

LAKSHAMMA OF MELUR.

“We have a reception in our house to-day, sisters,”

Somebody spoke close beside me. I was walking down to the market and thinking of something or other. Who should speak of a reception here? And in this tone? It was a little beyond the fort temple square and on the margin of the road. “Who is this talking?” I thought to myself and looked. It was a middle-aged woman. There was no one else near about, and clearly it was she that had uttered the words that startled me. The manner of speech was, however, normal, and so I stopped for a little while to hear what she would say further. I was not disappointed. “Please come to my house, sisters;” she proceeded to say; “do not fail to come. Come like the graces and bless my child, so he may prosper.”

Her manner was normal as before; but the place was wrong for the words. After I stopped there, some five or six people had passed close to the woman. She did not seem to be aware of them. It struck me that she must be blind. I went a little nearer and stood listening.

"Sister Narasamma, why do you laugh, my sister? Are you wondering what prosperity a blind child can have? How does it matter, sister, if a child is blind? It is a child all the same. When I stand at my door with my boy in my arms, my neighbour Sakamma's husband says it is like Yashoda with her Krishna in her arms. A blind Yashoda carrying a blind Krishna, do you say? Very well, my dear. If I say no, can I cease to be blind? This is our destiny and we must accept it. If gracious mothers like you had come and blessed my poor mother, I might have had eyes. If I had worshipped God properly, my child might have been saved from being blind. If you, like the graces, come and bless the boy today, his life may be good in spite of his being blind."

The woman, as I had thought, was blind. Not blind only, but also of unsound mind. She was sitting by the side of the road and remembering something and talking to herself. She was good-looking and had the *kumkum* mark on her face. Close beside her was a small bundle of clothing. She did not look like a mad woman of the streets but as if she had strayed from somewhere and dropped here. I stood where I was and continued to listen. She spoke again a

little later but her mind had moved to another topic.

“Oh, you silly girl, don’t you understand so much? You must pretend for some time, that is all. Say afterwards that somehow you are not able to see well. Sometime later say you can see much less. Finally they will know that you are blind. It does not matter. Till the marriage takes place you must pretend. When the marriage has taken place, will they give up the girl whom they have married? If they look after you properly and treat you well, well and good. Supposing they do not, there is no harm. Sit in the corner and eat what food they give and say it is God’s will. But, my dear, you must keep in mind some mark by which you can identify your husband. That is what I did, my child, to identify your father. There is a small wart about the size of a pea at the back of his left shoulder. When we first met, I noted that wart carefully and made sure of it as a mark. Otherwise, my dear, if some one wants to ruin a blind person like you or me, what is to save us? Our God should give us a sense of right and wrong, and we must have our wits about us. You know that time the scoundrel came up to me. He would not speak but touched me. He should have expected that I would

mistake him for your father. I told him: 'If you are my husband, speak and do not tease me. If you are not, please go away.' He pretended that his voice was hoarse and said in a distorted voice: 'My voice is hoarse.' I knew then that it was pretence. I told him: 'Stand for a moment.' He did. Then I touched where the wart should have been. It was not there. 'I tell you, by my God,' I said to him: 'You have come to do harm. Get out.' He would not and tried to force me. I slapped him on the face, my dear."

This last speech was one connected whole. Only, it had nothing to do with the previous speech about reception. It was advice given to a blind girl by her blind mother. Suddenly on the top of this remembrance came the cry: "Oh, they have beaten my child. They have killed my child. My God, my God." The woman began to remember the beating of some child and its death, and to wail. I felt great pity for this poor life. I wanted to find out to what place she belonged, and see if I could be of help. So I walked closer and said quietly: "Mother, what place do you belong to?"

"Melur."

"Whose family?"

She made no answer.

"Shall I send you to Melur, mother?"

"No, sir, I have started for Benares. My husband has gone to Benares. I have also started to go there."

"Then, why are you sitting near the market in Bangalore? Have you no companion?"

"No, sir, I have no companion. My husband went away. I said I would also go. My brother told me not to. I said there is no use in asking these people, and came away."

"You are talking here of all kinds of things. What is it all about?"

"Yes, sir, that happens to me now and then. I have seen better days. I bore children. My God, my child is dead. Oh, my little girl, have you gone and fallen into the well? Alas, for my fate! My God, my God."

The first three sentences were spoken in a lucid mind. The next three were insane words relating to some unpleasant memory. I thought for a moment and then said: "My mother, come to my house. You may go to Benares thereafter. I shall see if I can send you with a companion." I decided that I should send word to her brother.

She would not move from the place. I did not know what to do and went to the bus-stand and made enquiries of the conductors of the buses that had arrived from Melur. When I told them of a blind woman whose talk was disjointed and who had a bundle of clothes they recognised the lady. I asked them if it was right for them to bring such a woman into Bangalore. They said: "What could we do? We did not know she was insane. She was standing on the road and got into the bus. When we asked for the fare, she told us to ask her brother. When we told her to get down, she made a lot of trouble. So we brought her along and dropped her here." Then I told the conductors that I would pay the fare for the lady and asked them to take a note for me to Melur. Having arranged this I came back to where the lady was and hired a *jutka* and told her to get into it and come to my house. "Take some food," I said: "then you can go to Benares." "Who are you, my brother?" she said: "You are very good. You have come as my God in my hour of need." After some delay she got into the *jutka* and accompanied me to my house. Arrived at the house, however, she refused to step into it and stayed on the verandah. I asked my wife to attend to the poor woman and went

to my office. Her relatives would come some time before evening. If they came, I should have no further anxiety. If they did not, what should I do? I did not know, but put off the question. We shall see then, I said to myself.

When I was sitting in my office in the afternoon, someone came there and sent word for me. When I walked up and before I could put any question, the person said: "I got the note which you sent for me." I asked him if he belonged to Melur. "Yes," he said. "The lady is my younger sister. This morning she got up before any of us and went to the road where the bus arrives and got into it and came away. It was good fortune that a kind gentleman like you noticed her. Otherwise, I do not know what harm she might have come to and what trouble I should have had." I told him that I was glad to have been of use and what I had done was nothing, and asked him when he received my note. My note had reached him a little after food time. Wondering what had happened to his sister, the poor man had gone and had the wells in his village dragged. Some one later told him that he had seen the lady going towards the bus. He sent a servant to the road to enquire, when the buses returned, if this was the case.

The conductor of one of the buses had handed in my note. This brother started immediately and had arrived in Bangalore just a few minutes ago. He asked me if his sister was well. "Her mind is restless. Is it not?" I said. "That is so," he said. "If there is nothing else wrong I am satisfied. A woman of unsound mind and blind, getting into the bus and getting down and walking in the streets in this city, what accident may not happen in this scrimmage of motor cars and *jutkas*? People who are not blind and whose mind is sound are not safe in this confusion." I told him that his sister was quite safe; and going into the office for a moment to take permission from my superiors, I went with the gentleman to my house. On the way home, he told me the story of his sister's life.

2

Subbaramia was an astrologer in Melur. He had a son Narasimhia and a daughter Lakshamma. This was the brother and the lady was the sister. Lakshamma was born blind. She was very handsome and very intelligent, nevertheless. The father had brought her up with extra love as she was eyeless. He was a somewhat irate person. There was no one who had not felt the taste of his temper some time or other. But this daughter

of his could do whatever she liked without making him angry. In one sense this did good to the father. To illustrate the intelligence of the girl and the way in which she did her father good, Narasimhia related an incident. Once Subbaramia, after performing his mother's annual ceremony, was talking in the evening of that mother, and said that she was very good but that his father used to abuse her too much. Lakshamma said to him: "Just as we say that mother is so good but you abuse her all the time. Is it not, father?" Subbaramia was nonplussed, but a moment later he laughed and said: "Our Lakshmi is an incarnation of Maitreyi. She is teaching me the better life." This was only one of any number of such instances of unusual cleverness. The girl grew up cleverer than the average as if her wits had received compensation for the eyes she had been denied.

When Lakshamma was eight years old, the father tried hard to marry her off. Every one objected, however, on the ground of her blindness. The idea of some was that they might get some money from the father on the score of the girl's blindness. Subbaramia was not a well-to-do man. He had some ancestral lands and a house. His practice of astrology

brought him some spare cash. It was not much but the others had even less. These people were therefore thinking of the astrologer's cash. The old man, however, wished to celebrate the marriage without selling land or house. He failed and died before long. As a parting message to the son he said: "My son, something I had done in the past gave me a sightless daughter. I am leaving the girl on your hands. Do all you can and place her in a brahmin's hand. You are a good boy. God will bless you."

Narasimhia was older than his sister by quite eight years. He was told that it was a very good thing to give a girl in marriage in the year of the father's death. The merit of it would accrue to the departed soul. His mother also pressed him. He himself was anxious to settle his sister if possible. The father had delayed, and little time was left to the son to lose, for the girl was growing. For all these reasons the brother hurried up and arranged for a boy from among his relatives marrying his sister. He was himself unmarried, but he deferred thoughts of himself and sold some land and treated the brother-in-law to presents and other courtesy and celebrated the marriage. "My brother is a jewel," said Lakshamma. "He is treating his sister in such a way that she

cannot say her father is dead."

Some years passed and the girl became woman. The son-in-law's people, however, delayed taking Lakshamma into their house. They did not give any reason in so many words but let it be inferred that they wanted some more money before doing this. By this time Narasimhia also had married and reduced his patrimony still further. If he wished to give anything to the brother-in-law again, he could do so only by selling some more land. Lakshamma said to her brother: "Why should you strip yourself of house and home to make a place for me in another home? If they do not want me without my money, how much will they care for me even with the money? Let things take their course. Think that I am not a sister but a brother. I shall stay in the house in which I was born." Narasimhia was delighted at his sister's words, but as she was a good sister he was a good brother. "If you were brother, my dear, you would have taken half the property. We shall think that you are a brother, not a sister, and spend that half to settle you." So he sold some more land and gave the brother-in-law's family part at least of what they demanded, and sent the sister to her husband's house.

This husband was not much of a gentleman. He had married Lakshamma because his parents had desired him to do so. They had desired him to marry her because of the money she brought. The young man thought poorly of his wife. "What joy can this blind creature give me?" he thought. He was, besides, not troubled by any idea of being faithful to his wife. In the years that they lived together he treated the poor woman with all the indifference possible, short of saying that he did not want her. As her mother's house was in the same village Lakshamma spent some time there and some in her husband's home, and somehow passed the years. When she had lived as wife for three years she got a son. That child, however, was born blind. The people of her husband's house spoke such foul words on this account that she could not bear to think of them. Some years later she became pregnant again. She was in terror lest this second child should also be sightless. The whole household talked of nothing else. The days passed and she bore a girl-child. As fate would have it, that too was blind. When a boy in a village school repeats a mistake in his work the teacher gives him a beating on the knuckles. When Lakshamma bore a sightless daughter in succession to a sightless son,

the household repeated the foul words used on the previous occasion with ten times the strength. The poor woman was helpless. She had borne blind children and had quite enough of sorrow wondering what should happen to the poor things. But by this time she had become used to the household and could speak with some freedom. When somebody talked discourteously to her she said: "I was sightless, but in what way have I been less than others? I have borne a son, I have borne a daughter. I am doing what work I can in the house. The husband who married me may, if he likes, complain that I am blind. A woman who is not blind may watch her husband's movements and see to what places he goes. A fortunate woman like me is saved from this trouble. The husband also is saved from the trouble of a watchful wife. I am not going to allow all and sundry to scorn me for my blindness." The poor woman had developed, some kind of mental peace by continual thought of her circumstances, and thus, somehow, that life moved on.

While things stood with Lakshamma thus, a day came when her father-in-law had to perform his father's annual ceremony. When the old man had finished his bath and was clean for the

ceremony, Lakshamma's blind son, who was playing about the house, happened by chance to get across the grand-father's way and touch him. The whole ceremony was upset and the old man had to go and bathe a second time and begin the ceremony all over again. Lakshamma's husband was very wroth at his son and caught hold of him and gave him a good beating. He should have beaten the boy too much, for the boy cried out in agony. The blind mother went out to rescue the child. The father moved away to avoid her and prevent her getting at the child; and pulled the boy all over the yard and gave him a hard kick again and threw him into the house. This was the first time he had exercised the rights of a father. The beating was really excessive. It had also terrified the little fellow. He cried as if he would not stop and went on until he could cry no more. A fever came on and he died in three days. Lakshamma's position in the house became weak. About this time the mother-in-law raised some dispute and made the son and daughter-in-law separate from the joint household.

Some years passed and Lakshamma's daughter grew up. She had to be married. If they should say that she was completely blind, people would hesitate to marry her, thinking that

the mother had been blind and this daughter was blind, so her own daughter might be born blind. Lakshamma therefore tried to teach her daughter to pretend that she could see. That poor child tried to follow the mother's instructions and, as she moved about without feeling with her hand, hit her head against wall and pillar a few times. A few other times she made people laugh by walking one way when she should have gone some other way. The mother felt the disgrace of it all very keenly. Shortly after this she began to teach her daughter how she should conduct herself after marriage. A blind girl, she told her, should not strut about as people with eyes do. That would be pride. She ought to be humble. She should obey all people. To a woman in any circumstances her husband was God. If a woman was blind she ought to treat him with all the greater respect. In order to guard her own honour she should note some mark upon the husband's person, and so on and so forth. The blind mother would be always teaching the blind daughter about these things. The daughter said once or twice that it would be a good thing if she should die. One day she went with some other girls to a pond to bathe and was drowned. Whether she drowned herself intentionally, or it was an accident, it was hard to say.

Lakshamma was borne down by the weight of her grief. Several years of married life had brought a feeling of weariness to her husband, and he announced his intention to go on a pilgrimage to Benares. Lakshamma implored her husband not to go alone but take her. He did not listen. He told her to go to her brother's house and left the village. Lakshamma came back to her brother's house. She was then carrying for the third time and was delivered of a child a little prematurely in a few months. The child did not live. The sorrows that life had brought her affected Lakshamma's senses. She began to talk at times as if the children who had died were still alive. After two or three days of such clouding she would recover her senses. A few days previous to the occurrences that are narrated here, she had proposed to go to Benares to join her husband. The brother and mother tried to dissuade her. She did not listen. As the discussion was still going on, Lakshamma, that morning, had got up from her bed earlier than the others and in a state of half-wittedness had come away to Bangalore.

As Narasimhia was telling me this story we reached my house. Lakshamma had by that time bathed and taken some fruit and a little

milk. She recognised her brother by his voice and asked him to take her to Benares. Immediately she became aware, by some power of perception which the blind seem to develop, that somebody was standing beside her brother and asked: "Who is it with you?" I replied and said: "It is I, mother; the man of this house." It looks as if she had thought that her husband might have come. When she heard my voice, the light went out of her face. Narasimhia said to her: "Lakshamma, come, we shall go to our village." She said: "Quite so. Let us go to the village. There is that reception for the girl's growing up. I left that task and came away." Her wits had wandered again. Like a cloth tied against the breeze, they were playing about every moment. Narasimhia got a cart and put his sister into it and returned with her to the village.

3

This happened some three months ago. I sometimes wish to send word and find out how Lakshamma is. But the next moment I say to myself: "What is it I can do when I learn her condition?" And thus I have no desire to make any enquiry. When this talk came up yesterday in the house, my wife said to me: "Where is the limit to sorrow like this? If you go on enquiring

out all such things that you come to know of, where will be the end?" I said: "That poor woman's life is exceedingly hard." "It is the writing of Brahma," said my wife. I said: "I do not know what writing this is. It is like the writing of our Ramu." "You mean Shamu," said my wife. Shamu is our elder son; he has learnt the alphabet. Ramu is younger; he does not know the letters. He, however, is constantly employed drawing lines on a slate with a bit of pencil. When he has filled the slate with scrawls he brings it to me and says: "Father, I have written. See!" This was why my wife thought I might be meaning Shamu. I said: "Not Shamu. I mean Ramu. His writing consists in going on scrawling. If any part of the scrawl should form a letter it is not his fault. He neither knows nor intends it. In Brahma's writing also, the rule is for life to go meaninglessly as a scrawl. Of a hundred occurrences, not one is good. And if one out of a hundred is good, it occurs of itself; it is not his fault. He neither knows it nor intends it." My wife is of the opinion that this is useless philosophy. So she did not give much thought to what I was saying.

SUBEDAR IN DANGER

Some days ago after retirement from service I went on some private business to Vaipur. I am not giving you the real name of the town as I do not wish the persons mentioned in the story to be identified. I was employed in that district some years ago. This time when I went to the place I stayed in the travellers' bungalow. As I was going up and down the verandah one evening a man came up to me whom I had known before. I shall, of course, not tell you his correct name. For the purpose of this story it is Ramanna. A certain dispute in which this man was a party had come to my notice when I served in the district. Ramanna was a tough kind of man, unwilling to submit to defeat when beaten. That dispute went to a number of courts and was disposed of in various ways. No one but Ramanna could have told you exactly on what point it went up to each court in each stage and what in each instance the decision was. When Ramanna came to where I was pacing I looked up to see who it was. He folded his hands to me and I saw it was he and returned the courtesy and said, "You are Ramanna?" "Quite so, sir," he said. "So you remember me?" I asked. "Oh, sir," said Ramanna, "what is the great position I have attained to

make me forget you?" "Well then," I said: "tell me who I am and when you saw me." Ramanna said: "What a question, sir! Why, I remember as if it was only yesterday you and the gentleman who was For-Deputy-Commissioner in our district coming together to see my land". "That's correct," I said: "What happened finally in that dispute?" "Oh, sir," said Ramanna, "how am I to describe all that happened? Our Subedar gave a decision one way. Our Sub-division Officer gave it another way. The Deputy Commissioner said that the second decision was right. The Revenue Commissioner developed some difficulty against it. When we went to the Government they refused to entertain an appeal on a point of *faggot*." I could not follow the last word. "What do you mean by a point of *faggot*?" I said. "Point of *faggot*, sir," said Ramanna, "is a point about how things are. You know in all these disputes an appeal is refused or entertained according to the nature of a point. On a point of *faggot* it is refused. On a point of law it is entertained". "Oh, you mean point of fact?" "Quite so, sir" he said: "I am a poor fellow with no knowledge of English. I repeat what you who have learnt English say, and I repeat badly. When Government spoke of a

point of *faggot* I said : ' Great sirs, what has gone wrong now is the *faggot*. The Subedar did me harm in stating that the *faggot* was different from what it was. Now if you refuse to look at the point and to say he was wrong what is to happen to me ? ' If I had said this quietly they might not have entertained the appeal, sir. I shouted and so I believe they thought that they ought to entertain it. And finally, would you believe it, they found the point was in my favour ". I said : " That is good, isn't it ? Where is that Subedar now ? " " Who knows, sir ? " said Ramanna : " He must be living somewhere after retirement. But, sir, even while he was here he got into a lot of trouble. That itself is a big story ". " Really ? " I said : " Let us hear the story then ". Ramanna then told me some three or four incidents of the last years of the office of that Subedar in his Taluk. Concluding one of them he said : " The Subedar came to danger through the foot-soldier, sir," using the language of chess. I propose telling you now what Ramanna told me that day in this connection.

2

You know, sir, that that Subedar was an officer of the old style. You yourself know that he received some consideration from the other

side in my case and scratched off an order against me. He was also fond of women. You are aware that people have only to know of such weakness in a man in power and then the rogues of the place like those foxes in the Panchatantra story gather near him. This went on for a year or two. A cook that joined the Subedar about this time came to be of great help to him in these matters. The officer never moved anywhere but this man was with him. I dare say you remember this. You know that for officers of this type it is a great convenience to have at hand scoundrels like this cook. Our Subedar and his cook formed a combination like Rama and Hanuman. The servant, besides, had neither wife nor child. I do not know in fact from what part of the country he came. The men who had served the Subedar as cooks previously had merely to see that their master did not have to spend anything in camps. If anything remained over, it was brought into the house. But this man established a new tradition. Of the supplies received in camps he sent a quantity home in the first instance for meeting the needs of the household, and used only the remainder for the camp. Who could think of such a fine arrangement? Can the Patel and Shanbhogue of a village leave the Subedar who

is on a visit to their place to go hungry? And then the officer himself should not be blamed. Why? It was not he that sent any part of the supplies to the house. It was all the fault of the cook. And, after all, what was the relief open to the village officers? They should go to the Subedar and say: 'Sir, your cook is doing so and so'. It was not worthwhile, and when all is said and done, why should the Shanbhogue and Patel complain? They were not paying it from their personal property. The village raised a contribution and this was met out of it. You know the story about a Shanbhogue, sir?" I did not know what story Ramanna was thinking of. So I said: "What story?" "The story of the fine ordered in the course of the *Jamabandi* settlement," said Ramanna. "I do not know the story, Ramanna;" I said: "let me hear it". "You know, sir", said Ramanna, "that in a *Jamabandi* the Deputy Commissioner got very angry with the Shanbhogue and told him he had fined him ten rupees. The Shanbhogue kept quiet then. But when the business of the evening was over he stood in the presence and bowed in great respect. 'What is it?' said the officer. 'Your worship', said the Shanbhogue, 'you have fined me ten rupees. My village is a poor village

and cannot afford so heavy a fine'. If the Deputy Commissioner orders a fine against the Shanbhogue is it the Shanbhogue that will pay it? The people of the village have to pay it. It is just the same with the expenses of a Subedar's camp. And so, sir, when the Subedar became aware of the way in which his cook was looking after his interests, his delight knew no bounds. The lady of the house also was delighted beyond measure. They felt almost as if they should wonder whether the man that had come to the house was a cook or a God. When any dispute came up for decision this cook got into touch with the parties outside and found out which of them was prepared to pay more for a favourable decision and arranged it with the Subedar that that party should have the decision. The money agreed upon was also received by him and paid into the account of the Subedar. The balance in the officer's account in the treasury thus went on growing. You should not think that the cook altogether neglected his own interests. Whether he kept the money in the savings bank or not I cannot say. But very soon he had on his wrist a fine gold wrist-watch with a gold chain to hold it on. The Amildar had a gold wrist-watch but he did not have a gold chain. Why, you will ask, should a cook have a gold chain? As this man was

doing ceremonially purer work he could not wear a leather strap: therefore the gold chain. You may go one step further and ask why the cook needed a watch on his wrist. The answer is clear: he wanted the world to know that he was well-to-do. To supply other needs to the Subedar also the cook became the mediator. I am not sure that this particular officer had been given to much dalliance with the fair sex before this rogue came to him. But after this man came it became a routine. The responsibility for it all was the cook's. The Subedar had only the joy. Under such circumstances why should he reject the good fortune that came his way? But a little later the cook began to serve his master after Shabari's manner of serving fruits to Rama. You do not understand what I mean, sir? You know Shabari first tasted the fruits she gave Rama. Our great cook provided joy to his master after the same fashion. The Subedar discovered this after some time but what was it that he could do? He submitted to the inevitable, and so, sir, when some time had passed it was well understood in all the taluk that, as the Subedar was the master of the taluk, so the cook was the master of the Subedar. As things went on in this manner this fellow got a disease somewhere or other and had to lie in bed. The Subedar's household was not a

large one. So his wife cooked in the house. It was after all for a few days, she thought. She had of course to take the cook's food to him and to look after him. You would think, sir, that ordinarily a cook would hesitate to receive such services from the mistress of the house. But this was a grand fellow and felt no such hesitation. He received the services as if he were something more than the master of the house. All the servants of the household were astonished. The man got well. He did not resume his duties when he could. The mistress of the house said: 'Now you seem to be well. Will you look after the cooking?' The rogue answered: 'What is this, madam? Why are you in such a hurry to make me slave? Did I not labour in the house for one year without intermission? What is the harm done if you allow me to rest for ten days and give me my food?' By this time the Subedar had learnt a lesson and was wondering how he might release himself from this man. A few days later the cook resumed his work in the household and also in camp. Very shortly thereafter he began relations with a public woman in the town. That woman had so far been kept by a Sowcar. The woman wondered for some time who was more worth-while, this cook or that Sowcar,

and in the end decided to keep the cook and give up the Sowcar. The Sowcar was an aged man. This fellow was younger and, so far as money went, not less free-handed than the Sowcar. The Sowcar grew wild and in his anger one day sent four ruffians to the woman's house and had her beaten. Our rogue asked the woman to file a complaint in the court of the Subedar including the Sowcar as an accused. The Sowcar had not thought of this development and felt bewildered. The Subedar's cook was behind the woman and the Subedar would be trying this case. He was advised by some one at first to apply to a higher court and get the complaint transferred to another court. Other friends, however, made him see that that was not a wise course. If justice was done he should get punishment whether in this court or another court. He could escape only by injustice. Supposing he went to another court and stood before another magistrate and found that he could not be corrupted. What should happen? The best thing was to try to get away in this same court and from this magistrate who was not above corruption. Another magistrate might think himself a Yudhishtira of modern times and feel it an insult to be offered a bribe and call in the police and hand over the man offering money to be tried for a further offence. This parti-

cular Subedar loved the feel of money. It also struck the Sowcar that the fact of the cook being the instigator of the complaint might be made use of in another way. Supposing he made it worth the Subedar's while he might even ask his cook to withdraw the case. So he went to our Subedar on some pretext one day and, when other talk was over, raised this topic. Our Subedar agreed and called his cook and said: 'What is this, young fellow? It seems you are getting involved in the quarrels about a woman of the town?' He ought not to have taken such a high tone with the fellow. The cook said in reply: 'Why, sir? Who said that I went to share in the quarrels about any public woman? This woman is as honest as any household woman. When she cared for this Sowcar she allowed him to come to her. Now she is allowing me to visit her and will not allow a single other person to step near. If all married women were as true as this woman the world would be a much better place.' The Subedar did not know what to say to this. He thought that he should speak to the cook later and dropped the matter there. The Sowcar gave him the amount agreed upon. The Subedar put it into his savings bank account. The enquiry was postponed for one reason or another, first for one month, then for a second month and then for

a third month and then a fourth. The Subedar had the foolish expectation that if some time passed like this he would be able to get his cook's consent to what he wished to do. The complainant might take back the complaint or the magistrate might make some sort of an enquiry and say that the complaint was baseless or that the occurrence was of no great importance and let off the accused. But the poor man did not know what kind of person his cook was and how his qualities had grown under this master's patronage. As the trial was pushed further and further away the cook became more and more determined that the Sowcar should be punished. 'Come what may', he said openly, 'I am going to get this fellow booked. If my master gives him the punishment, well and good. If he does not, we shall go in appeal. I shall show to the world that this Sowcar's *sowcari* and this Subedar's *subedari* cannot stand against a man like me'. At this stage he gave up service in the Subedar's house and went into the business area and opened a lunch shop. Some time thereafter he went to the Subedar's house and told his wife: 'Madam, I have eaten food in your house. I have therefore no wish to do you harm. But now my honour is at stake. Pray, do not wonder at my using that word. As there is an honour for the Subedar

so there is an honour for the cook. I cannot afford to damage that. My master received money from the Sowcar in the case about that public woman and has kept it in his savings bank account. That money, madam, has a fly within. The master will not be able to retain that morsel. Pray ask him to return it to the Sowcar and decide the case properly. He need not fear he will lose the money. I shall get it back to him four-fold in other ways. If my master should, however, unfortunately prefer to retain that money and decide the case in the Sowcar's favour, I shall be forced to send a petition to superior authority. Gratitude for what you have done for me cannot blind me to the needs of my prestige. I know when the money was received from the Sowcar and when it was put into the savings bank account. I shall ask the superiors to come and see this. And let us see what will happen'. The poor woman reported all this to the husband and said: 'How can you get on if you make enemies of such rascals? Why did you go and take money in a case like this? Why should you have taken it so soon, and, even if you took it, could you not have kept it in the house or given it to my hands?' The Subedar saw how much sense there was in this. He realised that he was wrong in having placed himself in the power of the rogue. Two

or three days later he sent word to the fellow and said: 'My friend, when all is said and done you are a clever fellow. You are young in years but know the world. You were of great help to me. Why do you wish to injure the tree which you yourself watered? You no doubt know that you have also gained something by being near me. Consider all this and tell me how I shall proceed.' The cook said: 'That is very well, sir. But it is too late now. If you had asked me before you received money from the Sowcar I could have given advice. Now there is only one course and that is to return that money to him. Let the man go to the woman and express regret for what he did. You are the head of the taluk. The man cannot brush your advice aside. Immediately after this I shall bring an equal amount; or go out with you for three months more and earn the money for you'. The Subedar tried to move him from this position. The man would not agree. Finally the officer said: 'What shall I do? The whole town will know if I take money out of the savings bank to return it.' The cook said: 'Pass me a pro-note and I shall give you the money'. 'What?' said the Subedar. 'Shall I place my head in your noose?' 'Sir', said the cook, 'if I wish to injure you, is not what I know enough? Surely this

pro-note is not necessary to place you in my power? I may tell you that I touch fire every day and scorn all guile and fraud. I promise that I shall not harm you; after this you might do as you will.' The Subedar gave a pro-note to the cook and paid the Sowcar back and advised him to settle the case out of court. This the Sowcar was destined to do, sir. He went to the woman whom he had kept and begged her to forgive him. The matter was, of course, settled out of court. Eight days after this, our Subedar made an application for three months' leave. By the time that leave was over he was transferred to another taluk. I understood that after he went to his new place he paid back his cook the money he had taken on the pro-note. It looks as if the trouble he got into at the end of his stay here taught him a lesson. For I heard that in the other taluk he was slightly more honest."

3

When Ramanna finished his story I asked him if the cook was still in his town. "No, sir", said Ramanna: "I have not seen him here these days. The shop that he opened is of course there. But I believe he gave it up some three or four years ago. I believe he returned to his place". "Giving up that woman?" I said. "Oh,

sir", said Ramanna, "what is there in that? A man like that and a keep like this are not bound to each other. What should prevent them? That fellow went his way and our Sowcar has resumed his patronage of the woman." How much of the thing that Ramanna said is true and not true I do not know. Some at least of what he said must be inference. How should this man hear in such detail the words that passed between the cook and his master? On the whole, however, I should say that his story was true in outline. Because the Amildar had done him some harm he should have exaggerated the details here and there. It is quite common for such men to do this. I then said to Ramanna: "If the things you have said are true they would be derogatory to the very office of Subedar." "Oh, sir", said Ramanna, "it would not be right to say that. If one officer is bad why should the office be condemned? There is a constable. He behaves properly and gains a reputation for being a good man. There is a Collector who lives meanly and gets a bad name. What has the office got to do with the name? It is a man's ways that make him good or bad." I said: "So you have not had another Amildar like this in your taluk?" "The men we have had," said Ramanna, "in recent years are new people. A man of the old

type had no fear in receiving a bribe. A man of the new type trembles when receiving even his salary. The times are also risky. So much so, sir, you have to cool cold water before drinking." I smiled at the man's way of describing things. We talked of a few other matters and then Ramanna said: "May I take leave of you, sir?" I said, "Yes, Ramanna," and added, "and I want to say a word to you if I may." "Certainly, sir", said Ramanna. I said: "You ought not to go about telling everybody what you have been saying to me. Why, after all, should you ruin that Subedar's name?" "Oh, sir", replied Ramanna, "would I go about telling it to everyone? I do not tell even my wife. I saw you after such a long time and remembered what a friend you were of that good officer who was For-Deputy-Commissioner here. He was very good to us, sir. So I felt as if I would speak to his friend. That's why I told you. You may be sure I shall not feel like this to many persons." I said: "That's all right then. Thank you." And Ramanna went away.

I do not believe, however, that he will not repeat the story to many more persons.

UGRAPPA'S NEW YEAR DAY

1

When I first narrated the story of "Rangappa's Festival of Lights" as told by my respected friend Sri Shamanna, some people laughed at the title. One of them said: "Now that somebody has written of Rangappa's Festival of Lights, I shall write of Ugrappa's New Year Day". When I wrote "Venkat Rao's Ghost," I said that my friends ought not to laugh at it and say that they would write of Srikantia's Demon. If, in fact, they would write of Ugrappa's New Year Day and Srikantia's Demon, I should, I said, feel very happy. I find that since then a friend has written a story with the title "Srikantia's Demon," but no one has yet written a story with the title "Ugrappa's New Year Day." As it happens, funnily enough, there is an Ugrappa among my acquaintance, and he is the headman of Madarangi, a village in our neighbourhood. When, some days ago, I went to Madarangi on some business, I happened to see Ugrappa. His tenant Thimma was talking to him and Ugrappa seemed weary of something or other. "What is it, Ugrappa?" I said: "Something seems to have vexed you." He said: "What shall I do, sir? The people of the village make every day a new year day for me." A new year day is a

day of pleasure and a holiday to all people in Madarangi except the Patel. To him it is a day of endless fatigue. Like the mother of a house hold who prepares the food and feeds everyone, but is herself too tired at the end to take her meal with any pleasure, is Ugrappa leading his headman's life in Madarangi. Before someone else describes some new year day of some other Ugrappa, I shall give an account of a new year day in the life of this Ugrappa of mine. The day I am thinking of is a new year day now thirty years ago.

2

A little before dawn on that new year's day Ugrappa was awakened from sleep by some noise in the cattle-shed beside his dwelling house. It seemed to him that the cattle had taken fright and he heard a cow lowing. He got up from bed and walked to the door of the shed and called out: "Ho, Mara, are you there? Why have the cattle taken fright? See if it is any panther prowling about." His cry brought no response, and Mara did not seem to be there. So Ugrappa opened the door and walked in and called: "Ho, Mara!" Mara was not there. All the cattle were lying. Only a calf had got loose and was running about, its mother standing up near the byre and going from side to side close

to the peg to which it was tied. Hearing the cry of the master, the cow became quieter and the calf came up to him. Ugrappa called out, "Mara, Mara," again. By this time Ugrappa's brother who had heard his voice had got up and come to the cattle-shed. "What is it, brother?" he asked. Ugrappa said: "Some panther may be prowling about. See. We lost two cattle last year. Let us not lose a life on the very first day this year. Where is this fellow, Mara?" The younger brother said: "Where is this fellow, Mara! Mara is in the house of Lingi. What does he care what happens to the cattle! I shall take the fellow to task and then he will see!" Leaving the welfare of the cattle in the brother's hands, Ugrappa came to the front of his house.

It was beginning to dawn. Muniya, the Harijan who attended to the distribution of the water of the village tank, walked up to Ugrappa. "What am I to do with these people, master?" he began: "This Chinnappa's mischief is past bearing. You said three days ago that this man should have water one day and Ramappa another day. Last evening I went and stopped the water which was flowing to this man's land. I go this morning early and what do I see? It is still flowing to his land. I stood there. In a little while Chinnappa

came. Seeing me he says: 'What is this, Muniya? You have turned the water on to my land out of my turn.' 'Did I turn it, or did you?' I asked him. 'Will the water flow unless you direct it?' he says to me and then stops the water that was flowing to his land. This man has no sense of right and wrong; he does not care for justice. Turning the water to land is to him matter for laughing. If this is to be permitted, why should I be in charge of the channels? Let these men of the higher castes take charge of them."

Ugrappa said: "Don't be annoyed; we shall enquire," and started to go to the tank for his morning ablutions. The third house beyond his was Mariya's. Mariya just then stepped out of his house and said to Ugrappa: "Ugrappa, these panthers are doing too much havoc. We must place a trap on the hillock and tie a goat. A little while ago a panther had come near my cattle-shed." "O, had it?" said Ugrappa: "The cattle in our shed were in a fright and I went to see what the matter was and saw nothing. I thought it might be a panther. So, it had come, had it? Rascally creature!" Ugrappa did not know what to do with these panthers. Somehow God had made a hill so close to the village. What was to be done? And if there is a hill, there are sure to be panthers

in it. Once a year, without fail, these people would trap a panther and make play with it in the village and kill it. Three months would not pass before another panther came and occupied the hill again. "The panthers," said Ugrappa, "have developed a taste for Madarangi cattle. It looks as if they do not relish any other cattle so much."

The tank in front of Madarangi village is a beautiful piece of water. At one end of it is a huge peepul tree. Ugrappa walked into the water and washed himself and, coming to the peepul tree, folded his hands before it and went round it in reverence. Then he sat on its eastern side enjoying the cool breeze of the morning and looking for the sun. The air was flowing gently from the right, passing over the gardens of Hosahalli. The leaves of the peepul tree were still tender and the sound they made in the wind was very soft and gentle. Indeed, the tender leaf which was still red was making no sound at all—like a child which may have feeling, but no speech. At the other end of the tank-bund was a grove. The mango and the *ippe* which filled it had thick foliage and were looking beautiful. Some of the mango trees had begun to bear; most were still in flower. The air seemed to bring at times the smell of the *ippe*

flower. It could not be smell from the trees in this grove. It must have come from the trees in the groves belonging to Hosahalli. In the low ground at the distance was a line of *honge* trees. Their leaves were in twenty different shades of green and the ground below them was carpeted with their flowers. On this side, the tank showed too little water. What there was had to be used with care, so that cattle might have drinking water till the coming on of the rains.

The east grew red and bright. The sun came up from the horizon slowly. As soon as the first streak of his disc appeared over the horizon, Ugrappa stood up and folded his hands. Till the whole disc appeared above the rim he stood in this posture of reverence and then walked along the bund of the tank.

Harijan Muniya, who had stood about until this, now came and joined Ugrappa. "You have to use the water carefully, Muniya," said Ugrappa to his channel-man. "Yes, master," said Muniya: "Please tell that Chinnappa."

Chinnappa's field was visible in the distance. Ugrappa looked towards it and there on its margin was a sacred kite. As Ugrappa turned towards it, this bird got up from the ground and flew in a circle round Chinnappa's wet field

and got down on another part of the land. Ugrappa had not expected to have a view of the auspicious bird so early. He was very happy that he had seen it. He folded his hands to it and said the words in Sanskrit which he had learnt as a boy: "I bow to you, King of birds." He looked on until the bird had finished its circle in the sky and alighted on the ground. Then he proceeded to walk on the bund. Rama Sastry of the village met him there. The headman made salutations to him. The Sastry said: "Well, Ugrappa, are you looking at the tank-bund? The annual work has not been completed yet." "A good part of it is done," said Ugrappa. "If the water comes down a little more the people will finish what work is remaining." The Sastry said: "This is the good fortune of our village. Work of this kind is being done without difficulty. You should see what trouble there is about similar work in Madavara. You know, the villagers would not do the work there, and Government have decided to do it and recover the cost from the village." "If it should happen in our village," said Ugrappa, "How are we to live? The Madavara people are well-to-do and can afford to be defiant. Our poor village finds it hard to pay the regular dues. How is it to pay penalties?"

Sastry and Ugrappa thus talked of one thing and another for a little while. Then Sastry said: "I have to send my daughter to her husband's house. Her mother-in-law, it seems, is not well. My son-in-law has sent word. He could have come and taken the girl, but he has not come. The girl herself says that she must go to her house without delay. Otherwise, they would be angry." Ugrappa said: "That is what a girl should say. Why don't you send her?" Said the Sastry: "The four carts we have in our village are going for hire nearly every day. If they should ply for me, I am not in a position to give them the hire they would lose. The girl seems to be carrying. I told her to wait and said that I would ask for the use of your pony for a day. If you would only agree to give it I could send her to her husband's house." Ugrappa said: "It is no great matter; take it any day you like. If a daughter of Madarangi is to go to her husband's house, shall she not have the use of my pony? I shall manage somehow for a day or two." The Sastry said: "It is very good of you, Ugrappa. As you are headman, we are all happy in our village. We are always sure of your help in need." Ugrappa replied: "But I am getting a return for what I do. The people say that I am

good. Supposing Ugrappa refused to lend the pony, he is like any other man. Besides, my horse will have trespassed into your garden also some time or other. It will carry Sharadamma on its back in this journey and will pay back the debt." Rama Sastry laughed and moved away.

Ugrappa moved for some time in the grove beyond the tank-bund and in the grazing ground beyond, and turned towards the village. He remembered that his wife had told him the previous night that this day being New Year's Day, he should take an oil-bath. But for the disturbance in the cattle-shed early in the morning, he should have lain in bed a little longer and got up at the usual hour and taken the bath the first thing in the morning. But the panther had come and upset this programme. He was therefore walking somewhat fast to reach the house and finish the bath. As, however, he approached the gate of the village, a belted servant of the taluk office met him. "Well, Mookappa," said Ugrappa addressing him, "how does it happen that you come on a holiday?" The servant said: "The Shekdar has sent me to you. It seems that the headman of Gurusandra had undertaken to send the Amildar the jaggery he should distribute this New Year's Day. The jaggery collected from

the people was left with the Shanbhog. In a marriage in the Shanbhog's house, half that jaggery was used by oversight. The Shanbhog is making up some of the deficiency, but ten balls of jaggery are still required. The Shekdar asked me to see you and bring that much jaggery from here." "Well, Mookappa," said Ugrappa, "our village is a small one. It is difficult enough for us to provide the jaggery when our turn comes. How are we to make up deficiencies in other people's turns?" Then, after a pause: "Will ten balls be sufficient or does the Shekdar also require some jaggery?" The servant said: "That is left to you. You know our position well enough."

Ugrappa entered the village and took his seat in the village hall. He called some one passing in front and told him to bring four persons from their homes. The servant from the taluk sat in a corner of the *chavadi*. In a few minutes Ramappa and Chinnappa came up, talking and shouting in high dispute. Ramappa was saying to Chinnappa: "Well, then, here is the headman. Tell him everything and let him decide." By this time Rama Sastry and the priest Shama Bhatta came there and the people who had been sent for arrived one after another. Ramappa and Chinnappa urged their case. Ugrappa asked

them to wait a little and told the four people who had come that the Amildar required ten balls of jaggery and two more were required for the Shekdar, and that these four people should bring three balls each. They did not agree easily. "We gave jaggery when it was our turn. What is this raid again?" In deference to their grumbling, Ugrappa told them that they should bring two balls of jaggery each and that he himself would give the other four. He told Muniya to go to his house and bring four balls of jaggery.

When the problem about the jaggery was settled, Rama Sastry said: "Ugrappa, because you give so readily, these people ask you so frequently." "Because our headman is adjusting himself to them," the priest said, "these people are treating the village with consideration. The Amildar has three hundred villages to look after. Yet, this year, he gave a well to Madarangi village. Did he give one to every village? Supposing we had to sink this well ourselves, could we have done it with ten balls of jaggery?" The Sastry said: "The Amildar with three hundred villages to look after does not give a well to any village out of his pay. He gets it made from the Government's money. But, for whom is the jaggery?" Ugrappa said: "How could Government's money come to our

village to sink a well? The cloud rises to the sky with its consignment of water. Where the wind blows it there it goes, and there it pours the rain. We must get the wind to blow our way. If I am foolish and save the ten balls of jaggery, the village loses the goodwill of the authorities."

Ugrappa then turned to Chinnappa and said: "Well, Chinnappa, it seems you broke the arrangement which we came to in this *chavadi*. How is the village to get on?" Chinnappa at first denied that anything improper had been done and suggested that Muniya might have forgotten to stop the water flowing into his land. When Muniya loudly protested against the suggestion Chinnappa suggested that possibly the turf with which Muniya had closed the channel to his land might have given way. On Muniya's protesting against this suggestion also, Chinnappa admitted that possibly his servant had removed the turf in ignorance of the arrangements which had been ordered by the headman. This superior and half-reluctant admission could not be accepted. Ugrappa said: "This is high and mighty talk, but if an arrangement agreed on in the *chavadi* can be broken by one land-owner, what is the *chavadi* for?" "What is the *chavadi* for?" said Chinnappa: "For ruining land-owners."

"What is the matter, Chinnappa?" said Ugrappa: "You are talking wrong." By this time Chinnappa had lost his head. "What kind of headmanship was this?" he shouted. This was the most worthless headmanship possible. He had three acres of land to be watered and Ramappa had two. And yet the headman had arranged that water would be supplied one day to him and one day to Ramappa. Was this equitable? Ramappa was a relative of Ugrappa's. Therefore the headman was partial to him. "It is easy enough to be called headman and be honoured, but to be worthy of the position is not easy." Ugrappa in reply to all this put one question. "Will you be headman then, Chinnappa?" "Who said that?" said Channappa. "Why, then," said Ugrappa, "do you call my headmanship in question? Five days ago you agreed to an arrangement in the presence of ten others. Today you say that that arrangement was partial. If my headmanship is so worthless, it is up to you to execute the office worthily."

By this time the Shanbhog of the village had come and heard the words that were being exchanged. When Ugrappa finished speaking, he talked to Chinnappa quietly and in the end he got him to admit that what he had said was wrong. He further

decided that, as a penalty for having talked disrespectfully to the headman, Chinnappa should find the four balls of jaggery to be sent to the Amildar. Ugrappa did not agree to this. "Shall I take this jaggery from him? The Amildar is going to distribute the jaggery to the poor and the brahmins. If I give the jaggery some of the merit will be mine. I do not wish to lose it. I am going to bathe and distribute jaggery in my house today. Let some more of my jaggery be distributed there also." After some further discussion, it was decided that Chinnappa should find the jaggery for the distribution of syrup in the Rama festival in the village temple nine days later. By this time twelve balls of jaggery had been brought to the *chavadi*. Ugrappa called the servant who had come from the Shekdar, counted out the balls and got two young fellows of the village to carry them for him. Before Mookappa started Ugrappa told him that he might keep the smaller one of the two balls that had been given for the use of the Shekdar. "I myself wanted to ask," said Mookappa: "I am glad you have told me to take it," and he went off with his supply of jaggery.

The Sastry said: "How much of this will go to the Amildar, it is difficult to say." The priest said: "The man who collects the honey is

sure to lick his fingers. This servant will take some of the jaggery and the Shekdar will take some, and what remains will reach the Amildar's house." The Sastry said: "In any case, Ugrappa is not in a position to ask the Amildar if the jaggery reached him." "You think so." said the Shanbhog. "Ugrappa is not so resourceless. When he meets the Amildar next time, he will say to him that he was unable to send very good jaggery as he had not been told before, and that if he is given sufficient notice he will send better jaggery next time. Then, it will come out if the jaggery has not reached the Amildar."

Ugrappa smiled a little. By this time his children came from the house and said to him: "Mother says water is ready for the bath." Ugrappa turned to the priest and asked him: "Did you receive *dhal* and jaggery in the morning?" The priest said: "It must have been brought, I did not see." Ugrappa told his children to run home and ask if *dhal* and jaggery had been sent to the house of the priest and come back and tell him. They ran and asked their mother and came back and said it had been sent long ago.

The Shanbhog then raised the question of the collection of revenue. Two instalments were over and the third instalment was now due.

Fifteen of the land-owners were in arrears. A special effort should be made to bring the collection up-to-date in this instalment. The headman asked for the names of the people who were in arrears and sent Muniya to bring whomever of them he should find in their houses. Eight of these people came. It was afternoon by the time the Shanbhog could tell all of them how much was due from them, how much had been paid by them and how much was in arrears and convince them that his account was right. When this was over the Shanbhog said: "Friends, our headman was unwilling that you should be troubled on a holiday, but as the matter is important, we have had to do it. If you do not pay the amounts due this time, you might be getting a notice from the Taluk Office." Rajappa, one of the defaulters said: "Of course, you have to do your duty. If you do not give such a holiday to us, the Government will give it to you. Whatever happens, do not let them send us a notice. That would be a great pity."

Ugrappa said: "Is Madarangi become Madavara that it should receive a notice before it pays its dues? If a single notice is issued for recovery of arrears in this village, I should not care to be headman any longer."

Ugrappa had to go to the house now and take his bath. Before he reached home, his wife had heard that Chinnappa had been talking disrespectfully to her husband in the *chavadi*, and that to all this disrespect this husband of hers had given very mild and quiet answers. As soon as her husband came in, she let herself go: "What is this? Have you no idea of festival and ceremony? The whole village is observing the New Year Day. Should you not have the sense to anoint yourself and bathe before going out, and should you finish a whole year's headmanship in one day? All the children are waiting for you to come to take their meal and the sun is in mid-sky."

"What shall I do?" said Ugrappa. "Before ever I woke up a panther had come. Soon after came Muniya with a complaint against Chinnappa. Then came Mooka from the Shekdar asking for jaggery for the Amildar. The Shanbhog came along complaining of bad collections. Between one thing and another it was midday by the time I could leave the *chavadi*."

"What is this I heard?" said the wife. "It seems that Chinnappa abused you to his heart's content and you submitted to it. Is it open to any one who cares to revile your headmanship?"

Ugrappa replied: "He did abuse but soon

after agreed to compensate. The syrup of the Rama Navami festival this year will be at his expense."

Said the wife: "So is it come to this? Whoever is prepared to compensate by a day's syrup can abuse your mighty headmanship? How powerful our headman is!"

"Are you going to bathe me on account of the festival in these words," asked Ugrappa, "or will you anoint me and pour some water?"

By this time the wife had put a plank for Ugrappa to sit on at one end of the hall and placed the oil and the saffron in front of it. "There is your seat ready for you," she said and went in and brought out one or two other things required. Ugrappa sat on his plank and the wife did all the honours of the oil-bath of the New Year Day. This over, she said to him: "You complain of my giving you a bath with my words. If that fellow Chinnappa who has nothing to do with you may abuse you on a festival day, should not your wife say a word or two? I can also make compensation." Ugrappa replied: "If that small fellow lost his head and used wrong words to me, what do you wish I should have done?" "What do I wish!" said the wife. "I wish you, when a man misbehaves to you, to teach him a lesson.

Who is he, anyway, to be insolent to the headman of the village? You should have asked him what he meant by his nonsense and slapped him on the cheek." Ugrappa replied: "If our child beats me on the cheek am I to beat him in return? If the child beats, I can stand it. If I beat, can the child stand it?" "What wife bore you Chinnappa?" came the query. Ugrappa said: "If a landowner gets angry, the headman can come to no harm, but if the headman should become angry, will the landowner live? It is a festival day: forgive him." After this was the long and elaborate bath of the New Year's Day. After that was the standing before God and offering incense and distributing jaggery to half a dozen houses and taking the tender leaf of the neem tree with a little jaggery which had been placed before God by the priest and sent after consecration. When all this was over, the headman took his food with the children and rested a little.

Not a quarter of an hour passed. The village watchman came and reported that, as the cattle of the village were grazing on the village plain, a panther had attacked them, and that Ranga, the chief cowherd, had gone at it with his club and beaten it to death. The panther's carcass had been brought and placed in front of the *chavadi*. The

headman had to go there. By the time Ugrappa went, nearly all the village had gathered near the *chavadi*. The joy of the people knew no bounds, in that the panther had been killed on the first day of the year. "I knew that the creature's business was over when it came within our headman's sight," said Muniya. No one seemed to take note of the fact that Mariyappa had seen the panther. No one again seemed to be aware that Ugrappa had not actually cast eyes on the creature. Pillappa who was gifted with imagination had already constructed a story that, when Ugrappa went into the cattle-shed, the panther was sitting on the wall surrounding the shed, that its two eyes were shining like two balls of amethyst, and that the panther jumped out on seeing the headman and fled. "What are amethysts like?" asked Muniyappa. "Look at the panther's eyes," said Pillappa; "They are like that." Muniyappa replied: "What is the pleasure of looking at a dead panther's eyes?" By this time Ranga had been adored in proper style by all the population. They had made a stone seat for him below the platform of the *chavadi* and placed him on it in a victor's pose and pulled the carcass of the panther and placed it near his left foot. When Ugrappa came, the

crowd made way for him. All the honour that Ranga received for having slain the panther the headman received for being supposed to have seen the panther before any one else in the morning. With the headman's permission, the people decorated the panther's body and put flowers upon the hero who had slain it and took the two in procession through the village. It was also decided that according to custom the procession should go to two neighbouring villages and that thereafter the carcass should be taken to the Taluk Office for bringing the reward. The headman accompanied the procession in the village and turned home when it left for the neighbouring villages.

Ugrappa was really very tired. He had been a reasonably thin man when young. Once upon a time he himself had shot a panther and gone round the village in procession. Then, his eldest son was two years old. Now that boy was sixteen years old and Ugrappa was in middle age. Since those days his abdomen had shown a tendency to expand. It seemed to him that it was a trial to the soul to carry a body of the sort he had in procession in the sun at two in the afternoon. The only thing in the procession that seemed no worse for the sun was the

carcass of the panther. With this thought sinking into his mind, the headman reached home. His mother blamed him for having gone out in the sun. "Even on a festival day you sit in the *chavadi*. You take your oil-bath after midday, and because a panther dies, you go in procession in the sun. Should you not know better? Could you not have sent your son to represent you?" The headman replied: "You are vexed because your son went out in the heat of midday. If I did not go but sent my son, your daughter-in-law would find fault with me. What should I say to her?"

Ugrappa then lay down a little. Within a few minutes the priest Shama Bhatta came along to see Ugrappa. Ugrappa got up and had a plank placed for the priest and sat with him. "Well, Ugrappa," said the priest, "you seem to be very tired." Ugrappa was very tired, but was not prepared to say so. "Well," he said, "not very tired. What brought you here now? They have arranged for the reading in the evening, haven't they?" The reading in the evening was the reading of the calendar for the year according to custom. The priest had not come to speak about that, but about something else. Seeing, however, how tired Ugrappa was, he did not talk of his business. He told him, instead, the story of

Kuchela. As soon as the priest began to tell a story, all the children of the house ran up and sat close to Ugrappa. His mother and his wife sat a few yards away and listened. The story that the priest told them was no new one. If it was new, it was so only to the children. If the elders thought it new, it was because they had forgotten the details. In any case, no one who heard it objected to the story. Krishna is eternally young and his story is ever fresh. As the priest was telling the story elaborating every detail, the *archak* of the village temple came there from Madavara. That evening, according to custom, there was to be worship in the Madarangi temple and that worship was conducted on behalf of the headman's household. The priest finished the story and suggesting that the reading of the calendar in the night might, if possible, be somewhat earlier than usual, left for his house. After this, some time was taken in giving to the *archak* the things he required for the service in the temple. Ugrappa's wife was a woman of marked prudence. It was not easy to get things out of her hands. So the *archak* got what he required in the presence of Ugrappa.

By this time the sun had begun to descend. When the headman thought of lying down a little,

the mother told him that he ought not to sleep in the evening on a festival day. Ugrappa needed some rest but had no chance of taking it. He therefore left the house and proceeded to the *chavadi*. The elders of the village who had not gone out with the procession of the panther came to the *chavadi* and sat with him, and they spent the time till evening talking. The village cattle came in and the voice of the cowherd boys was sweet in the air. The elders of the village said: "By god's grace, we were saved the calamity of the panther taking our cattle on the New Year's Day. This is all due to the goodness of our headman." Ugrappa knew that this was said in affection. Yet he felt happy that the people loved him so as to make such a statement. He and a few others went to the tank when the sun had set, and had a wash and then walked up to the village temple.

It was somewhat late when the service in the temple concluded. As all the young fellows of the village had gone with the panther, some time was lost in waiting for them. This became necessary, more particularly because the service was the headman's. Whoever was left out would be hurt and say: "Am I so worthless a person that I need not be present when the headman of

our village is having the service done in the temple?" Altogether by the time the worship was concluded and the consecrated food was distributed and everybody left for home, it was quite late. On leaving the temple, they all decided to finish supper early and go to the *chavadi* to hear the calendar read, with the least possible delay.

The reading of the calendar was always an elaborate affair and took some time. Describing the look of the sky with the constellations, forecasting the rain and the crops, and telling every peasant how things would stand with him in the course of the year, was the programme. By the time it was over, all the children were fast asleep just where they had been sitting and almost all the elders were yawning. The headman got up and started for the house eager for rest.

The priest told his children to take the grain he had received to the house, and followed the headman.

Ugrappa asked him: "Was there anything you wanted to say?"

The Bhatta said: "Yes, Ugrappa. I came to ask you in the afternoon, but I saw you were tired. I wanted to put off telling you for a day

or two. But my wife says that today is a good day and that I should ask you today. 'Our headman has made a gift of jaggery today, let him also make a gift of brahminhood,' she says. So I have come to ask you on this auspicious day."

He meant that he had to invest his son with the sacred thread. This was a matter of expense and the headman was to help him.

Ugrappa said: "Why not, we shall do it this year. How old is the boy?"

The priest said that he was ten years old. "I ought to have done it last year alone. The crops were not good and I did not know how I could trouble you. Not to do it this year would be a serious omission. The boy has so grown and I am afraid of his coming to harm for want of initiation. Whether he does the other duties of a brahmin or not, he ought at least to repeat the *gayatri* every day. Otherwise, what is the use of his being born a brahmin?"

"Quite so," said the headman. "Let alone the boy coming to harm; it is not good for the village that a brahmin boy should be going about in it without his thread. Do it this year. The people will manage and contribute the expense." By this time they arrived at the headman's house

and the priest left him there and went to his own house.

The headman went into the house and got into bed in the inner enclosure. At one end of it his wife had spread her bed and was sitting with the children lying near. The headman's mother had spread her bed even earlier in the outer hall. As soon as her son came and lay on his bed, she came and sat near him. "Son," she said, "the New Year has come. I waited that the New-moon day might be over in order to ask you. Now you must promise me, so that my desire may be fulfilled before I close my eyes."

"Well, mother," said the headman, "we shall talk about it tomorrow."

The mother said: "Who is tomorrow and who am I? Say 'yes' today; it is a good day. The boy has grown up and the girl is as pretty as a doll. She walks like a little filly. Your wife is anxious to bring her brother's daughter as her daughter-in-law and that girl is like a stick. If you listen to me now, my wish will be fulfilled. If you do not and I die, the thing will of course not take place."

Ugrappa's wife spoke from where she was: "Why do you speak inauspicious speech of dying and all the rest of it on a feast day? When has your son carried out any wish of mine in

preference to yours? It has been the other way always. Mother and son, and son and mother. Let my brother's daughter be a stick if it pleases you to say so, and let your own grand-daughter be a beauty. Do not I desire as much as any one else that my son should have to wife a good-looking girl? Bring your pretty doll and make her his wife. Who said, do not? Only, if my brother asks me why, I shall say that you were obstinate and would not have his daughter. He will know what to think of you. Earn a great name."

"Well, son," said the old woman to Ugrappa, "your wife also has agreed. Only you have to say 'yes' now."

"Very well, mother," said Ugrappa: "your daughter-in-law is not a stranger to you. You brought her to be your daughter-in-law because she was your brother's daughter. She wanted to bring her brother's daughter in the same way. If you say you do not agree, why would she say that she must. Your desire is her desire."

The old woman got up saying: "I shall sleep well today," and went to the outer hall to her bed.

When the mother-in-law had left, Ugrappa's wife came and sat near him and gave him some *pan* and nuts which she had kept ready. Chewing them, Ugrappa said: "Getting the girl you like

to be your daughter-in-law, you are making my mother responsible for dropping your niece. You are very clever."

His wife said: "If I say no, will you give up your sister's daughter? If you do not want your mother to have all the blame, take a half share yourself and welcome." "Shall I have even the share that should be yours?" said Ugrappa, and touched her lightly on the cheek in fun. The wife had her cheek full of chewed *pan* and nut and Ugrappa's touch fell lightly on it as a caress; and thus Ugrappa's New Year night deepened in joy and friendliness.

